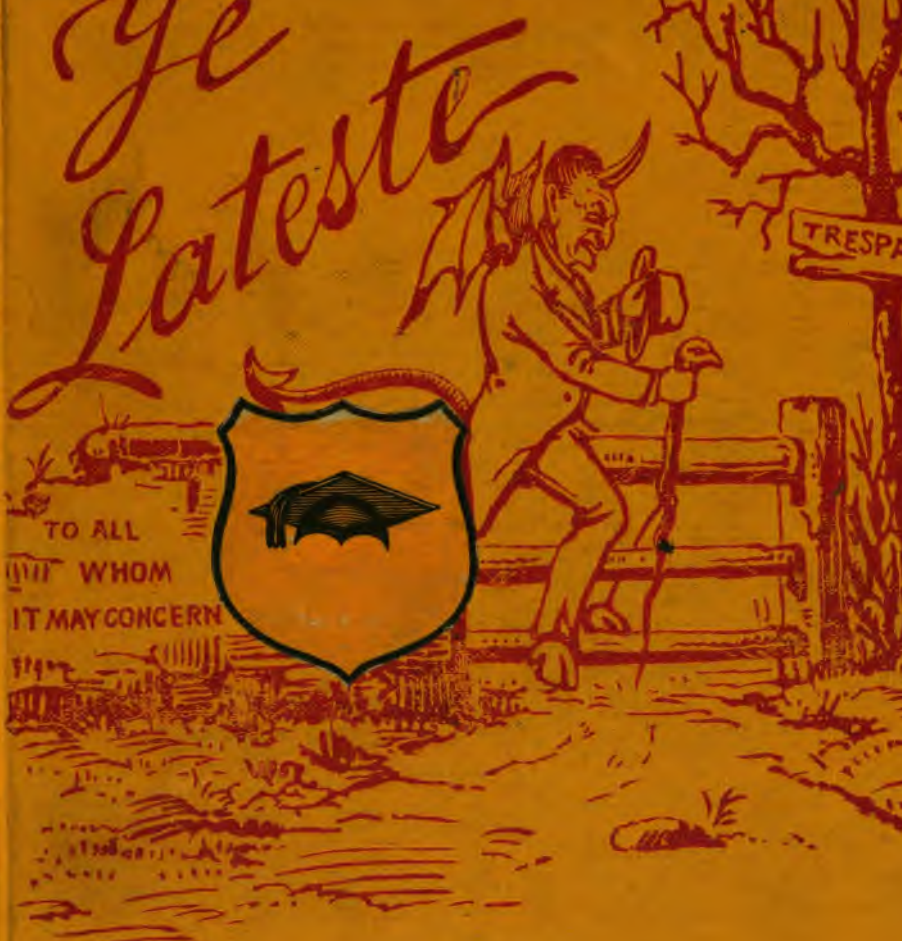
Ye Lateste



TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

BY YE

LATE REVEREND J. G. TAYLIR A.M

YE LATESTE D'EVIL.

YE LATESTE D'EVIL.

A CONTRIBUTION TO UNIVERSAL BIOGRAPHY
BY THAT LEARNED AND PIOUS

DIVINE,

JACOB G. TAYLIRE, A.M.,

SETTING FORTH BRIEFLY SOME ACCOUNT OF THE
LIFE AND DEATH OF HIS

SATANIC MAJESTY,

From Original Documents never before published.

EDITED BY

S. P. E. C. K.

"But fare you well, auld Nickie-ben
Oh, wad ye tak' a thought an' men !
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken."

Burns.

LONDON:
THOS. BOSWORTH & CO., 66, GREAT RUSSELL STREET.
1884.

Dedicated

TO THE

CURATES, CRITICS, AND OLD MAIDS

OF THE

UNITED KINGDOM

OF

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH, &c.,

BY

THE SPECIAL PERMISSION

OF

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW,

WHO WILL GLADLY GIRD UP HER

WRINKLES,

AND SETTLE THE POINT WITH ONE OR ALL THREE TOGETHER,

WHO MAY WISH TO CONTEST HER PRIVILEGE;

BUT

I ADVISE THEM

NOT TO.

N.B.—All persons, to whom this book is dedicated, are permitted, by above Mother-in-law, to receive a copy of this immortal work, post free,—if they can get one.

PREFACE.

In the middle of a modern English winter, when one can neither see for fog, nor walk for mud, if I find myself in the fluent stage of catarrh, with Christmas close at hand, no money and many bills, instead of beating the children and being angry with their mother, I leave the room, put on an overcoat and sit in the garret without a fireplace, where I can see the smoke of my neighbours' chimnies.

Here I dream. I revisit the early spring tides of my childhood. I hear the bees humming among the gooseberry bloom, I chase the butterfly among the wild flowers, I stand in silence beneath the pine trees, delighted to hear the first note of the cuckoo. It is one mad revel in reality, without its dregs. I utter a yell of delight. Then the turbulent waves subside into soft vibrations and I descend into the

world of catarrh and debt, in a state of gently suffused sunshine, as if I was enchanted.

This is the method of my madness. So, to-day, because all is brilliant and I feel in a mood of moral and religious exaltation, I write the life of the Devil.

By some fatal sympathy, any marks of decay of former grandeur flood me with mournfulness that will not be translated into language, whether I sit on the ruins of the Coliseum, or see a wrinkled old woman raking for cinders, as she shivers in a March wind. So I crave indulgence, if I describe the fortunes and fall of an ancient house, with a melancholy earnestness by no means suited to a guide-book.

September 4th, 1884.

YE LATESTE D'EVIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE family of the Devils is so ancient that its rise is lost in obscurity. Though many of them have become nationalized in this country, you must not look for their origin in England.

They do not primarily belong to the British nobility, by which you will know they did not "come over with William the Conqueror;" neither do they owe their start in life to the noble but irregular passions of the second Charles, since whose day there have been no important additions to the British peerage.

It would seem from the evolution theory that originally this haughty family were sons of the soil, differing from their neighbours mainly because they were more quarrelsome and more selfish. By these virtues they early acquired a superiority over the quieter sort, and what they gained they guarded zealously, till it passed into a proverb "to fight like devils." Centuries after the proverb had spread over the European continent and its origin was defaced

by time, the Monarch, who had reached a position of splendour undreamt of by the founders of the family, lived in regal luxury and all but dominated the world. In every land his palaces and castles reared their haughty fronts and spread the terrors of his name. His minions slept not by day or night, that they might subdue the earth to him.

The Monarch no mortal had seen, and human imagination had pictured him as an ubiquitous giant with more than savage ferocity, finding delight only in the banqueting hall of Hades, where the shouts of wretches or revellers resounded perpetually round its blazing fire.

A wave of gloom flooded the civilized world, known as the Dark Ages, and it is no exaggeration to say that during that period the only undimmed light was the fire of Hades.

There were persons who had never heard of the Creator of the world; but all had heard of King Beelzebub.

For centuries pious men exhausted their genius and their art to decorate their churches with scenes from the life history of the Tyrant. The earliest service composed for the infant mind uttered his name with solemnity, and the last prayer of the dying spoke of him with respect mingled with awe.*

* The superstitious rustic felt that he kindled the sun's western glow, and decorated the breast of the robin.—Cf. *Lecky, European Morals*, vol. ii., pp. 224, 225.

Here, then, we see him established in a vast superiority of power. His dependents were countless, his offspring innumerable. His harem blazed with the wit and beauty of all lands. One small despised society, conducted mainly by some fishermen, alone refused his claim to imperial rule.

The historian has therefore to inquire into the causes of the decline of this unparalleled power.

Some attribute this to his polygamy, and this theory is very current amongst the Teutonic race. It was originated by a lady of some eminence, and much temper, whose husband had eloped with her maid; and it was so illogical that nearly all women have adopted it.

Others are of opinion that he never recovered from a sudden blow he received from an ink-bottle, thrown at him by a German commentator. This opinion is held by all theologians who are commentators.

Cambridge men say it was owing to a lack of mathematical accuracy in keeping the records of births and marriages in his family.

Oxford men allege that it was his indifference to the "*dead* languages," which cost him his life.

But I could fill volumes of this method of treating a great historical question.

Permit me to say, then, that this vast downfall arose (if a *down*-fall can rise) from even a more trivial cause than women or ink-bottles.

I have already stated that the Monarch was

never seen by men, and this contributed greatly to his power, as we shall see hereafter. Then it was generally believed that he had a cloven foot, a caudal process and a horn. Whether this belief was purely false, or contained some glimpses of truth revealed by one of the flunkeys, every intelligent reader of this veracious history will prefer to decide for himself.

But the fact remains that they exercised a potent spell over the human mind.

Nearly all historians agree that the Monarch possessed unrivalled intellectual powers, but they have failed to note that there was a restlessness, which often took the form of suspicion. It was this very suspicion which indirectly led to his downfall. For it happened that he was uneasy about a disaffected portion of his kingdom, and thought that his captains were receiving bribes from the enemy, so one evening he stole forth in disguise and unattended to visit this district in person. He had wandered about in the shape of a tax-gatherer for some hours and made many interesting notes. Occasionally he had been told to go to himself or invited to take a seat by his own fire, in the monosyllabic vernacular of that country.

He was musing on the causes of his unpopularity, and in a fit of abstraction sat on a gate devising how he should bring about a marriage with this race and thus reinstate his authority. A singular figure had

noted him some hours before with an ominous scowl, and, feeling a growing curiosity about the strange tax-gatherer, had followed him.

Now when the Monarch did a bit of extra tough intellectual work, he had a habit of constantly applying his fore-finger to his horn, and so on this occasion he had laid aside his huge Quaker-like hat and sat ruminating abstractedly.

The figure that had followed him was no other than the valiant George, a general in the army, and a knight-errant, who would draw his sword on anything from a wood-louse to a dragon.

When George saw the horn, his worst suspicions were confirmed. He felt a heavy weight at his stomach, as if he had dined off horse-shoes and swallowed them whole. Then he thought of fame. The visions of glory which had filled his young being came back like an electric flash, scattering sparks of radiant light on the whole track of the future. Often had he fought with *forms* of evil—now he might cope with *evil* itself.

He felt his rusty sword and then came in sight of the Monarch, who immediately resumed his hat and began with such an insinuating address to make general inquiries, that the Knight almost doubted his own senses, and wondered whether his eyes or his ears had abandoned their normal functions.

But in the parley he noted the limping gait of the stranger, and discovered that all was not right with

one foot. He no longer doubted. His answers grew curt; his inquiries were not courteous; words ran on apace, and then it came to blows. Each drew his sword, and many a stroke whistled in the wind, while the fortunes of the human race hung on a single parry and thrust.

Little harm had been done, except that George had cleft the Quaker-hat and slightly wounded the horn of the Monarch, when a band of monks on a pilgrimage passed down the lane.

The Monarch disappeared.

The Knight told a strange tale of the adventure to the gaping monks. At first they grew pale and trembled, whether from fright at an adversary or from fear for an ally, we need not inquire. But the Knight laughed and chuckled. He only demanded a grind-stone to take the rust off his sword, and an oyster supper to give him the nightmare, then nothing could please him better than a stand-up fight with this terror of all the earth.

Each monk spread his own version of the story; and in no long time it became current that the Monarch was wounded, that he was dead, that he was buried, &c., &c.

George was discharged from the army because he had shown some bravery and much prompt tact, and, above all, because he had begun and finished a battle without the consent of the House of Commons; but he received offers of marriage from every

female who had a whole heart and a fractional fortune in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. He was prayed to or for at many a shrine; the shape of his shield was held proof against witchcraft; and a survival of this faith may still be seen in the horse-shoes nailed on doors of cow-sheds and pig-styes. What an apotheosis!

The Monarch returned home, removed his disguise, dressed for dinner, and appeared at the head of the table with the true state of his feelings as well concealed as if he were a lady of fashion. His favourite wife thought his salute a little chilly, and wished he would always stay by the fire and keep his affections up to bridal temperature. But a banquet remedies many ills, and dinner mellowed the royal gourmand into affability.

When all was over the King sought a sense of life in the freedom from restraint, as in dressing-gown and smoking-cap he pulled at an eternal hookah, whilst his confidential secretary came to give him the news of the last twenty-four hours. Foremost amongst the items he gave the information that two of his wives had died in his absence. This was not a new occurrence. The family of Devils had become proverbial for their longevity, and the hoary Monarch had seen many vacancies in the changing pantomime of his harem, and, like all old married people, he had long survived sentiment.

But there was the bother. Funerals are a necessary evil, and Court-mourning an inevitable compliment.

But it formed a favourable opening for negotiating a marriage with the inhabitants of the country which had been the scene of his late duel.

Thus even to monarchs, though the most pitiable objects of the human race, there is some alleviation to that burden we call life. One of his sons had formed a powerful political alliance in the capital of the very country which had been the cause of his late visit. For the Prime Minister of that island had, by means of a very tempting offer, secured his permanent residence there, with a lucrative post and every honour that an office of the Crown could confer. No duties were attached to the post, except to smoke cigarettes, read the morning papers, and instruct the statesman how to speak like truth but mean nothing.

So, although the Monarch was uneasy about his duel and the rumours that would arise from it, to say nothing of his horn, which ached considerably, he felt more hopeful with regard to this country than he had done for weeks, and passed through his harem with an amount of waggery that was unusual.

CHAPTER II.

NEXT morning, however, matters were more serious; for the wounded horn had become much worse, and throbbed so violently that it seemed to open like the mouth of a barrister's clerk when he names his master's fee. The Monarch was confined to his room, and there he remained some months.

It appears that the poisonous rust of George's sword had accomplished what all his valour and strength might have failed to achieve. Probably if he had possessed a true, bright blade, no serious harm had been done, and the history of the world would have been changed. Thus we see the wisdom of the English Government in making third-rate provisions of arms and ammunition for their soldiers.

I state this frankly, as I need no longer disguise the country where the Monarch had his duel. In that country meantime the disaffection had spread rapidly. George's story was told with every possible admixture of exaggeration and falsehood; and this is said to have been the occasion on which newspapers originated.

From some versions of George's story it seemed

that the Monarch was a black, deformed, disreputable character, to be loathed and kicked, but no longer to be feared. His palace was no mansion of splendour, but a dungeon somewhere in the earth, a little lower than where potatoes grow.

Some scurrilous poet made a caricature of this subterranean polygamy, in which the word Hades chinked with ladies; and after ballad singers had circulated the intelligence "Hades" could no longer be used without a smile, and, for the sake of pulpit oratory, his mansion was called "Hell."

So much power rests in a name. The most cultured nations and the keenest intellects had accepted Hades as a realm of sombre pageantry, where untainted gloom brooded over its sunless rivers, and shadowy forms passed an afternoon existence in its gloaming, fed with the hope of Elysian sunlight. But to call it Hell was to tear down the venerable arras woven by long generations over its bare walls, which no fire could render cheerful.

Then pious people began to see visions, and one, more saintly than the rest, had a direct revelation, and he saw the Monarch bound on a red-hot grid-iron, writhing and clutching at the fleeting shades of men. This vision was circulated among the common people, and spread with amazing rapidity.

Meanwhile, in his mansion, the King had recovered, but he was maimed for life. The horn

having divided where the sword caught it, was no longer an object of terror, for it grew gradually less, a scale periodically falling off. This was a subject of great uneasiness to the King; his emissaries, moreover, told him of the rumours that were current in this disaffected corner of his kingdom. So he determined to make another journey thither. Less disguise was necessary, as he was growing more human in appearance day by day. He found the district in arms against him, and more than one valiant saint interviewed him with phials of holy water and crucifixes, with beads and jargon, which seemed like gibing taunts over the fallen. He was compelled to remain for some time, or give up the contest.

CHAPTER III.

NOW libellers plied a brisk trade. The Monarch was down, and the only thing was to hit him, and to strike hard.

Those who had seen him declared that he was like other men; his horn was only an ordinary wart; his clothes were good, but he had been known to take money, for many had sold themselves into his service.

The years rolled on; sedition spread; the horn grew less; his wives dropped off, and new brides did not take their places; the seraglio had the forbidding aspect of a mother-in-law doing up her back hair; relics of old mourning and wrinkles of new date gave a tawdry look even to the best boudoir.

The King grew rather slobbering; he carefully kept the scales of his horn in a box, and spent a good deal of time in arranging and re-arranging them. They were not inviting, and about as full of sentiment as a worn-out tooth-brush.

He was thus employed in the soft twilight of an autumn evening when his chief Captain returned, and was at once announced, for he had news of importance. The old Monarch paused, as he saw

his vigorous and exultant Captain, and turned from his scales, as Justinian from Theodora, to receive this second Belisarius.

The Captain described how that, amongst a fair-haired race, he had met with a young widow, whose spell of witchery and radiance of beauty would re-establish the tottering empire of the earth.

In her presence men forgot their bitterness and their greed, and renounced the rewards of earth to dream in vacancy of coming glories. Troops of young, ardent, heroic souls, deluded by her smile, realized every dream of chivalry, and devoted every gift of life to her service.

Many felt she could not be mortal, and all owned she *looked* god-like. Nations had coalesced to found her kingdom; statesmen defended her; priests rendered her ceaseless adoration; and, above all, women envied her not, but deemed a single smile from her as a passport to the home of immortal light.

The Captain was a man of action, noted for his shrewdness and hard metallic soul. That he should lose himself in a rhapsody of panegyric on a common marketable commodity like female beauty, filled the Monarch with a dumb surprise.

But it soon roused more active passions, and an electric radiance, too fascinating to be called light, filled his eyes for an instant, and lent his haggard face a passing flush of that youthful charm which

had won every Court of the civilized world, and created him Monarch of a realm so vast, that even in its decay, it hid the splendours of the petty dynasties that stood gaping to gorge upon its wreckage.

So in a few brief questions the Monarch asked her name, her pedigree, and her fortune. For he had a musical ear and a name was something, he belonged to an unsullied aristocracy, and pedigree was as indispensable to him as to a prize dog. He had reaped every benefit, without the disadvantages, of polygamy, for his empire had *grown* with his wives, but he had suffered no inconvenience on account of them.

The Captain knew the difficulties, but felt undaunted, and smiling with an air of triumph, said—

"May it please your Majesty, her name is as harmonious as her beauty, it would seem that upon her voluptuous form have settled soft cadences of distant music, for her maiden name was Miss Bamboozle Cant.

"Her pedigree extends beyond the known limits of time, and in her meet and mingle those long lines of lineage whose blue blood deepens into the darkness of mythology. Her father's name is Success, the only survivor of the two most ancient ruling dynasties, Force and Fraud. Her mother's name was Religion, the sole heiress, by marriage, of the oldest of the human families, Ignorance and Fear.

"Though a widow, she is but a girl, for in her childhood she was espoused to Truth; but that potentate died soon after their marriage, leaving no heir to his dominions.

"Her fortune is her empire, which is that part of the world that does not belong to your Majesty."

The Captain bowed and waited for the effect with the inimitable pose of Randy Pandy's moustache, when he has fired one chamber of his pocket-revolver-eloquence into the face of two yawning local reporters.

The proposal met with the Monarch's approval, and some hours were spent that evening in making the necessary arrangements.

CHAPTER IV.

MEANTIME history had not stood still in the disaffected region with which our biography is so closely connected. Many a pious person, as an enemy to spiritual darkness, had vigorously stirred the fires of hell, that he might spread a truer light. Caricatures of the Monarch became still more gross and even bestial.

Many saints had seen him in the form of a black dog that had no master, and kept remarkably late hours; or in the shape of a præternaturally dark-hued cat, whose tail had lost its sense of proportion, and whose eyes were strangely luminous when the sun did *not* shine.

I can give no idea to a modern reader of the effect of this method of treatment. For at that time the bulk of uneducated Britishers had not trained their intellect to the subtleties of transcendental philosophy. Yet the character of the laws and religion of the country was mainly determined by them. Parliament finally settled both the laws and the religion; but at that remote period Parliament was formed not of the men who knew most, but of men who possessed some wealth, and the rare art of persuading the mob that they were martyrs to the

cause of the people, whilst they were only serving their own interests. So that the reader will perceive that any foolish legend which made its way through every village and town of England, by its influence on the popular feelings, changed the destiny of all that was highest in the nation.

Some years before the Monarch had wooed his last bride, a man of great intellect and goodness, called John Methody, had made a lasting impression on the people. His name was almost a proverb for sanctity. Many pages could not tell of the benefits which he conferred upon his country. Though he may have shared in some of the erroneous views about the Monarch, he did not call him "Old Nick," and use disparaging epithets, for he had been brought up to regard him as almost a friend, and spoke of him tenderly as "Old Tom."

John lived in one of those cycles when Egyptian darkness is rendered tenfold more ghastly by English cold. Every day he saw the poor dying without food or comfort, consolation or hope, whilst their reverend shepherds called them together once a week to taunt them because they were poor, and lean, and despairing. He gave his life to succour the helpless, and his memory still lives to cheer the weak and despised.

After his death, his followers refusing his advice and incapable of his self-devotion, adopted his weaknesses, and calling themselves after his name,

established the first religious co-operative stores. They avowed that their chief objects were to supply a cheap article and to warrant that everything was home-made. To the world they were known as Methodies, but those of the inner brotherhood called themselves, We-sly-uns. They offered rewards for works of the highest imitative skill, and soon they were able to produce all the solid articles of religion as rapidly as a Birmingham manufactory can turn out old Roman coins. For the rest they trusted to the state of the weather, the liver, and the more violent emotions.

With regard to their relationship to the Monarch, evidence is conflicting. Their enemies maintain that originally they were his subjects, but that the higher officers being dissatisfied with their salary, struggled into a less dependent condition. Others aver that the more ignorant belonged to the Fisherman's Guild, already named, but they had been seduced by the charms of Mrs. Bamboozle to support her cause, and finally had become a suzerainty of the Monarch as part of her dowry. I regret to leave this important step in doubt, but as it is to a great extent theological, no historian has yet been able to clear it up.

However, when they come into any prominence, we find them a singular and flourishing body, with peculiar tenets and methods. For whilst the Monarch had been leisurely arranging "the cold

remains" of his horn, the noble army of Weslyuns had grown apace by a new mode of propagandism. They described the Monarch as being in a restless state of somnambulism. He was held forth as a creature that roamed up and down the earth, sharpening his teeth with the grim purpose of an ill-fed solicitor. It shows how flunkeys delude the world, when they undertake to write the life of their masters.

As there are many persons who are greatly terrified at strange cats and dogs in the dark, these clever people took out a patent for a process, or said they had, by which all persons might be freed from four-footed and other forms of devilry; the operation is mis-named Conversion. It consisted mainly in turning the patient round in a dexterous manner till he was giddy, and telling him to believe that he could walk straight. In some cases the operation had to be repeated often, and not unfrequently produced violent hysteria, when the patient's shouting was relieved by all the rest shouting in chorus.

Now the persons who received a direct salary for spreading this patent, used to go from place to place, in their own language "like the first bishops to visit our flock." Perhaps there was a singular appropriateness in the word "flock," for never were sheep more easily led astray than these converts from ignorance and brutality. The tides of passion

ran high, great excitement led to frequent divisions —too often increased by those who should have healed them. About the time of the most formidable of these agitations, they began to call themselves ministers, but woe unto the flock that did not minister unto them.

Now, as the ministers could not always be present they appointed at each place a roll-caller who kept a register of the inner-brotherhood and collected their weekly pence, on which occasion he used to inquire into their general condition and special experience, what they had felt and what triumphs of faith they had enjoyed. On one of these occasions a man related that the Lord had made him ill, and, whilst he was living on faith and gruel, one evening the Devil entered the house in the form of a black sheep, and after butting over two or three of the children, it made for his wife; she was a nervous woman and felt at once that it was the Devil; she looked at the old family Bible and said "Lord help me," then fell to a hand-to-hand fight with the enemy of souls. She wrestled long and made the wool fly. At last her faith conquered, and the Devil went home leaving much of his fleece behind him. She picked up the wool and made him a pair of stockings out of it.

When he had finished they were all in tears, and a shout of Hallelujah rent the air at the sight of the stockings.

They told this story to the next minister who

went, and, as he was a young man with a great gift for anecdotes, who meant to be President of the Conference, he went to the woman and took down all the details and received the stockings as a proof that they were true. This story went through all England amongst the lower folk who attend missionary meetings to hear jokes about black men, who are only monkeys with their tails rubbed off by sitting.

Mark the descent of his Sublime Highness. He was a Monarch, he became a soldier, a man, a faithful animal, a silly sheep. Human vision was now unfettered; and ecstasy and indigestion, aided by faith and ignorance, peopled space with fleeting shadows that were felt to be the lodgings of the Monarch.

This all contributed to a great popular movement, which, like other popular movements, was slowly tending to an end which the authors had never seen and of which they had never dreamt.

CHAPTER V.

BUT long before some of these things had taken place, the marriage had been arranged, and Mrs. Cant (for in her own country she was still called by her better known, family name) had laid aside her name to develop her nature. Fabulous sums had been spent in trimming up the Monarch's favourite palace, at Blackingbox—(some antiquarians have suggested it was so called because all black things, such as coffee and dress suits, were supposed to come originally from that country)—and more than one steward had gone mad in trying to stem the tide of expenses. Tailors and dentists and hair-dressers had racked their ingenuity in trying to screw up the royal piece of antiquity into something like a traditional bridegroom, and finally a few men of science by the aid of galvanism and protoplasm had so quickened his circulation and filled up his wrinkles, that the azure eyes of Mrs. Cant sparkled with witchery, treacherous as summer lightning, when first they beheld him. For she expected that she had married an empire and not a lord. In fact, a wedding was to her well-regulated mind a polite, if disagreeable, method of tacking on an estate to one's rent-roll. A few wrinkled old dames who had

occupied recesses in the harem till they were almost as antiquated and ugly as cracked china, pursed up their hairy lips with a vain attempt at juvenile astonishment. Wives they could hardly be called, for there was not one of them who could be said to have exchanged an angry word with the Monarch for a quarter of a century.

However, he sent them a few cheap presents on the morning of his last marriage, and this soothed their vanity; and these ancient sideboards of former delight found ample compensation in feeling that the golden-haired bride would also fade and bleach in the ozone of time, till every winning grace should become adipose tissue and her golden locks would hang like specimens of second-hand frost.

On her arrival, there was all that bustle of festivity and mirth which belongs only to the hey-day of youth, hope and delusion. She brought her own retainers, had her own wing in the mansion, and thought no more of the bundles of wrinkles who had once been brides than an Englishman thinks of yesterday's sermon or this morning's paper.

But all this bustle soon settled down into stale magnificence, and palace life was apparently given up to routine and flunkeys. It turned out that King Truth had left a will behind him which took a great deal of gilt off the above Captain's speech, for upon Mrs. Bamboozle's marriage, his kingdoms lapsed to two distant kinsmen, Enquiry and Doubt. So that

the bride brought only her own fortune, which was by no means large enough to restore the tottering empire, though it might prop it up for some years.

The Monarch's horn continued to shed its scales; and there was a singular contrast between the brilliancy of the blue-eyed bride and the opaqueness of departed horn, which seemed the only two objects of the Monarch's life.

Her Majesty found relief for the play of her wit and the force of her fascination, in editing tracts for Sunday-school teachers on the inner victory of faith.

As time rolled on she broke the monotony of existence by a new ripple on its wave, and presented the Monarch with a son—the subject of this biography.

All the other sons of the aged King were afloat in the world, pushing their way in the lucrative professions or gay saloons of European capitals. They took their names from their mothers, and each mother's children formed a separate family. This obviated the difficulty of domestic life which is supposed to attend polygamy; and I state the fact here that it may help some future legislator of our country, when women have ceased to marry and have become scholars, philosophers, statesmen and soldiers; for then it is manifest that we must return to the ancient order of polyandry, and one rich respectable female will keep two or three men, pretty much as now they keep two or three cats.

The harem had become more vacant, and the

disappointed creatures whose looks had long been full of wormwood and gall had left their bodies to spread new rumours amongst the worms, and to warn the genus Lumbricus not to seek royal cemeteries when they took their holiday trips.

I shall not give any detailed account of the life of this young representative of all that was ancient and much that was sacred; for I am inclined to doubt whether the early years of life give any indication of the future character, because I have been informed by many credible witnesses that there was a period in the early history of married women and tigers, when they were harmless, and in some instances pleasing.

This young Prince had many advantages, but notwithstanding them he lived pretty much as other young animals of the biped order. The Monarch devoted much of his time to him; for experience had taught him to doubt the supreme wisdom of trusting a boy, at the most important part of his life, to half-educated females, whose chief maxim was that in order to expand the mind for all that is noble, it must first learn the most tortuous windings of female deceit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Devils were a precocious family, and in every instance where they had entered professions, they had given indications long before they were eight years old what profession they intended. One day when the old Monarch was amusing the Prince, and they had played for hours at cobby-house, pag-a-back, and hide-and-seek, the pair of smaller legs grew tired, and he demanded a new game; and, after a search, some bricks were produced that had amused former generations, whilst with them they had built imaginary palaces. But on this occasion, as the tiny fingers stacked them up they were cruciform, and one end was higher than the other, like an embryo tower. The old Monarch recognized the outline of a church, and felt a stab—(of disgust, not fear, gentle reader,)—but he hoped it was only an accident. He was poor, and his greatness was covered with mildew, so that he had been compelled to allow his sons to enter various professions; but never had one of them taken orders, there had been no need. The sacerdotal mind had been so docile to his suggestions, and had laid aside every noble purpose to amass wealth, till they were a hierarchy to trample on the necks of kings; and

when they had removed every vestige of aught that, even in mimic, could have reminded men of Nazareth, then they demanded a universal faith from men that they were Nazerenes. Set as lights in the world to represent its true Trinity of purity, peace, and love, they had outraged every moral feeling, they had filled the fields of earth with their slain, and their love was the most treacherous sham which had ever poisoned the intercourse of the human race.

It would have been "sending coals to Newcastle" with a vengeance to have allowed his family to take part in a piece of work that, from his point of view, was conducted without a flaw.

But here was the outburst of that singular form of life which all time increases, but which no time can destroy, which we in our impotence style instinct. For there, all unconscious to this young child, was an inclination to religious symbols.

This dim foreshadowing of ecclesiasticism ripened rapidly, and soon the Prince wished to know more of the system than he could decipher from the images stamped on his molecular palimpsest. His mother viewed it with satisfaction, and the aged Monarch was sadly altering. His horn was short, and he had a presentiment that the horn was the measure of his life. Such is the concatenation of existence, that intelligence is bound up with form, and probably life itself is also a slave to shape.

Therefore soon they had to discuss to what land they should send the Prince, for in Blackingbox there were no churches, and the Monarch believed that to insure success it was necessary to be habituated early to the customs and climate of the future sphere of action.

The world was open to their choice. For the Prince's mother was in correspondence with potentates, politicians, bishops, and cardinals on the entire globe, and she had but to suggest that she wished her son to see any particular country, and as many suites of apartments would be placed at her disposal as there were pores in a sponge.

Their task was lightened considerably because, from evident hereditary causes, the Prince had no horn or other *inhumanity* whatever, and so no disguise was necessary. Many a time had the singular appendages of this family convulsed Europe, and given rise to grotesque fashions. Whilst some poor Frenchman was anathematized for his whimsicalities, it was only his last device to conceal the deformity of some Blackingbox prince or princess by means of strange head-gear, bustles, false hips, or miraculous boots. The English "top-hat" is said to have come into fashion on one of these occasions.

But this Prince was a fair-haired, blue-eyed boy, with much of the soft radiance of his mother when she used to conduct prayer-meetings in her youth.

Yet within, every faculty was sharpened as by the whet-stone of ages, and his will was that of the long line of autocrats that culminated in himself. Such a being was sure to be a hero in camp or court.

They agreed that he must be sent to some European State. Then, after much discussion, England was adopted, as affording the finest field for political and social influence, combined with a recognized form of religion. But in what aspect should he come?

This was a difficult question, for insular prejudice was strong, and popular clamour was fast becoming the final standard of appeal.

It was felt that a poorish Prince not attached to the Court would be an anomalous position, and perhaps the avowed connection with Blackingbox was not to be desired. On all points the Monarch consulted his son, the *attaché* of the Prime Minister above named, who had been Prime Minister himself since then, and was old and nationalized. He recommended that all connection with Blackingbox should be concealed, and that he should come over as a German count; he would furnish a few notes of introduction, and then for the rest he would easily make his way.

Accordingly, in a short time, the youthful Prince arrived, and settled as Count von Schwärzbüchse und Flaschenbürste.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS first quarters were in London, because here it was thought he would see a good deal of the nation in miniature, at least, of what was bad; and his half-brother thought that such a form of English life was the only one to afford any passing delight to a descendent of the Monarch. But in this he was mistaken.

The Prince had that marvellous faculty for language which all the Monarch's sons possessed; for if the mind is so much white paper at first, then Nature must have kept a paper-mill not far from the land of their birth, for they seemed to have an illimitable expanse on which to write all languages and all facts; therefore he made rapid progress amongst the old stumps that we call Saxon. He saw, of course, the usual gay circles, and would have been a favourite with the women if he had not too openly and somewhat scornfully shown his poverty; for the one spell that never fails to remove a feminine friend is impecuniosity. He always got on well with the men; but he was prevented from acquiring any fame amongst them because he did not shoot pigeons, and he either couldn't or wouldn't learn billiards; and, worse than either of

these, he was fond of the best literature, and would often ask questions of some native about an author which the native did not know from a Salamander. The native, on all such occasions, smiled his contempt, and said, of course, all Germans were alike, and the sooner the nation was bound in white vellum the better for it.

This is no place to give an account of the marvellous impressions that London produced on his susceptibilities, because he was so young, that he tells me he must modify several views that he has, in the form of notes of that time. But he read history backwards with a facility and a penetration that no observer of his young life could have imagined. He wandered miles in seeking every spot of importance; he spent months in the storehouses of art and history, which are only to be found in the metropolis; he was a member of more than one scientific society, before which he read papers that sparkled with profound originality. Most of these papers found their way into the waste-paper baskets of the best London publishers, for he sent them under some unknown English name.

But one rainy week he wrote a volume proving that "Affection was Lust, Moulded by Habit," enclosed it with his card, and saw it in every shop window within a fortnight. Female circles were unusually severe upon it, but it was evident that their rage

was only a clamorous acknowledgment of its truth. Thus some years passed.

Meantime domestic history had gone so fast that annalists foresaw it would soon run away. The harem was utterly empty; the horn was as low as the ideal of life in the wealthy circles of modern society; the mansion at Blackingbox could no longer be kept up; the royal couriers that had long traversed Europe, and the captains whose prowess had nearly equalled the higher instincts of tigers, had, one by one, become threads in the gray woof of the past. And now, lonely and penurious, the Monarch only wished to die, unknown and without witnesses. So he sought London as the fittest hiding-place for departed glory and growing scum. All was done quietly, and, except to a chosen circle of faithful adherents, the residence of the Monarch was a profound secret.

Mrs. Bamboozle sniffed London smoke as her native air, and her smile caught a gilding light from London fog. She was soon the leader of countless committees, which species of society she herself had originated.

By one of those flukes which in this country make a fortune, she brought out a tract on "The Religious Use of the Relativity of Sexes." It was a masterly attempt to show a speedy method of galvanizing the sexual passions into religious emotion. It derived

much of its popularity and power from the life-like reality which pervaded it; for its most telling passages were transcribed bodily from the diary of an eminently successful Methodist minister, a little disguised and gilded by additions from the reminiscences of a fashionable Court preacher.

It sold like an American patent medicine, and did much to relieve the fortune of the Devils.

Our young Count had left his teens far behind. A mad unrest urged him to seek some definite pursuit. It will not seem strange to a careful reader that his inner nature, instead of being a well-spring of life, was a battle-ground of struggle; for there was the definite, energetic reality of one parent, biassed and warped by the plastic forces of all that was religious, except religion itself. So that there were moments of cool, calculating, irresistible design, bent on conquest at all sacrifice; there were also seasons of transfiguration, when the triumph of goodness appeared attainable, and there dawned the gorgeous dream of unveiling the creed of ages and sleeping at last with all that is pure in that tomb which is the cradle of light. Everywhere in the mighty metropolis the fever strife raged fatally, and immortal forces were burnt like the *tinder* of forgotten forests, not to cast a light on the progress of a race, but to amass consols and be drowned in turtle soup. In the midst of this mad riot, where the successful were cannibals and lived on their brethren, and the

disappointed were mad and lived on themselves, he would walk pensively and try to decipher the objects of the strange beings who were new to him. Here and there were fragments of those past upheavals in which men had roasted each other for a creed. The perversion of such mighty moral earnestness blinded and scorched him like an apocalypse of unknown fire.

He had spoken with his relative, the ex-Prime Minister, on the choice of a profession, and that august person, who had created Canons, Deans, and Bishops out of clay, and made them Princes, had no great opinion of the sweet dignity of church preferment. He knew the mere accidents which had determined this promotion in nearly every instance; that promotion often meant a little political influence, a successfully-conducted school, an after-dinner compliment in presence of the Premier, marriage into the family of a Peer, or even reading another man's sermon with emphasis at an obscure country church.

He shook his head at the notion of any lofty ideal of self-sacrifice and noble work, and said that no application of heavenly machinery would ever induce an Englishman to spell his *creed* except with a *g*. He thought the English nation had only three more stages through which to pass—a little debauchery, a long bankruptcy, and an indecent funeral; for he maintained that her moral earnestness had evaporated

in a storm-cloud of persecution, that the Pantheon of all men was their banking account, and that the foundations of *another* world were out of joint.

But he added, playfully, "Consult your mother; there is a great sympathy between the English mind and her own, and her advice ought to aid you."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRINCE departed from this sage of the nineteenth century somewhat depressed, for he was feeling that life had no object, and the longevity of his race horrified him. If an even mixture of cunning and brutality could have placed him at the head of countless hordes of savage warriors, he might have danced from the cradle to the grave in the delusion and delirium that men call success. But to be the lord of so many round pieces of coin and so much stamped paper, that would have been colourless as a shroud, had it not been soaked in the blood of the starving, seemed to him no better than the office of paid jester to death and corruption.

In this mood he wandered into Westminster Abbey, and sat down to give himself up to the soothing spell of this august mausoleum. It seemed to him there must be some hidden power in a system of religion, to which so many of the noblest, whose records are there, owed their life's triumph, and which still continues the consolation of peasants and laundresses. He felt that religion was the parent of civilization, and that, though the child was often wanton and scornful, and sometimes, in its

mad rush to catch the mirage, would trample its parent in the dust, yet it always came back, baffled, humiliated, and penitent, to be ruled by the force which is love.

A singular spectacle this, of a bold and brilliant youth, sitting amidst mouldering tombs and dusty remains, whilst fire-fancies and flashing visions swept through his brain, until his being scintillated with the radiance of every age and clime. For nothing short of a force which had flowed through its channel for measureless olympiads, could have wrested his life from the fettered monotony of an ancient despotism and vivified him, as with the breath of genius, into a living sympathy with a new race and an unfashionable religion. Was it some strange proclivity of physical particles that was impelling him to clerical life? Had some momentary impulse from without shaken into life one minute germ, which had been transmitted from a hoary antiquity, through all the darkness and distortion in which men had sought a living religion? Was it merely hereditary influence, because in ages illimitably remote, some naked ancestor had shivered in the delirium of fear, when he offered a sacrifice to that awful incarnation of his own fancy, which he called God? We cannot say;—the fact remains.

That same evening he discussed a profession with his mother, and by her consent decided that he would take orders. A frozen smile limped across

the rugged features of the Monarch, like the first full ray of dawn stepping across the scales of an alligator, that sparkles on the *bank* of its native river.

Then they selected his University, and as Oxford is the home of religious revivals, to Oxford he must go.

Arrangements were made, and testimonials fabricated in the usual manner. The Principal of Wooden Spoon College would be pleased to accept the foreign Count, without the formal mockery of a matriculation examination. A bright day about the middle of October saw the Count's departure for Oxford, the old Monarch took off the last scale of the horn, and gave it to him as a parting gift, with a mixture of benumbed jocundity and expiring pathos. The higher filial instincts threw a graceful mantle over this paternal frailty, and with an unnatural commiseration for the parent, who had never understood him, he said adieu, and hurried to vulgar life in a hansom.

CHAPTER IX.

THE bright short day was hiding its glories when he approached the ancient city. A lingering mist, saddening as the early death of loveliness, nestled amongst the creepers that festooned with fleeting beauty these ancient walls, that have survived the decay of dynasties and the mutability of creeds, only to grow mellow with a melodious silence that mocks the jarring of factions and the rancour of hatreds.

A train is said to possess little poetry but rapid motion through some fair landscape scenery, and the sweet novelty of an opening future had prepared the mind of the Count to revel in his new home, as in the spell of fairy enchantment. But the approach to this shrine of classic antiquity, and ten minutes' jostling and kicking at the station, made him more nearly a John Bull than all his former life.

The cabs had long since all been taken by the time he could disentangle his effects from the mountain of luggage, which presented the appearance of a miniature chaos, imported by order of some artist who wished to paint a præ-adamic scripture piece. After chafing considerably under the so-called railway regulations, a cab returned and

conveyed him through some disreputable streets to his hotel. The enchantment had vanished, and the fairy city receded into the gloom of vulgar life.

But it was one of those superb evenings which comes in October to remind us of weather we might have had months before but for east winds and pelting rains, and he strolled forth to survey the city under the subtle metamorphosis of moonlight. Nor was he disappointed. The hours glided away as if in dreamy brilliance, as the moonbeams caressed the mouldering walls and ancient spires with their soft *shimmer*.

* * * * *

Next morning, in due course, he presented himself to the Principal of Wooden Spoon, the Rev. Dr. Jamit Filledful. This ancient gentleman, swathed in a gigantic choker and a set smile, received the young Count with the sparkling benignity of a benevolent fossil. The learned Doctor had been professor of mathematics, and was supposed even now to feed his mind on this spare diet. At any rate he was very thin, and looked dry enough to be cut up for beetles' wings. His dry exactitude was always attributed to his mathematical food, but probably no one would have known that he was either dry or exact, unless they had been told that he was supposed to read mathematics. Nothing was said of reading, or books, or profession, or the future. The Count was somewhat startled and very

much amused. He little knew that he had come to a land of lotus eaters, where the clotted cream of indifference and bowls of Lethean wine form the ambrosial repast of more than ordinary mortals.

Rooms were selected and furniture valued, whilst a scout, in the dress of a broken-down gentleman, and with the shuffling ease of a patronizing peer, seemed rather to give orders than to receive them. He had helped so many generations of "young bloods" to find the dearest tradesmen and buy the worst goods at the highest price, that he felt he was an important factor in civilization, and worthy of a Government office.

But there was a restless light in the keen gray eyes of this latest arrival, which seemed to fall on both sides of the room at once, and perturbed a little his fungoid serenity. The Count's name was at present a thing of mystery, but the scout trusted to his foreign extraction as a rich sub-soil that might yield him a golden harvest.

Everywhere there were arrivals, and their mirth seemed like the laughter of pilgrims, which rings through the dust of an ancient sarcophagus. And there, too, was the Count, with mountains of luggage piled upon the floor. He had put on his hat to go a short walk through Oxford before dark, but either owing to the effect of the train's motion on his liver, or to the tinge of sadness caught from the look of his ancient mother, he was moody and

stepped into the vast recess of his window, and watched the leaves that fell and the mist that rose, whilst he gave way to tender thoughts, which would have exposed him to the ridicule of Oxford *men*, but won the sympathy of an Oxford *man*. For the Oxford man by himself is one animal, and in company quite another. But this he knew not then. Presently his reverie was disturbed by the entrance of two scouts. Seeing the room empty and his hat gone, they assumed that he was out, and the younger said,—

"Well, George, what sort of a bird is this?"

"Not much of a catch, I reckons," replied George, "for he asked the cabby what his fare was. Now, no gentleman would do that. He would give him a half-crown or two quite by accident like and walk away. And then when I saw him pick up his hat-box and carry it in, I said, damme, I am done again. You know, Bill, I have had all sorts of gentlemen in my time and I can nearly smell one now. But let us look into his bed-room. If he has washed I can tell you at once whether he is a gentleman. Well, he has washed, and he is a snob. This is deuced hard on me, Bill, I get nothing but snobs now."

"But," answered Bill, trying to smooth over this grievous disappointment, "you may be wrong, you know; why should all them who have money in their pockets wash alike?"

"I *may* be wrong," said George, in a tone meant

to imitate the sarcasm of his masters, "but I tell you when a gentleman washes, he don't take a tea-cup full of water like that, he fills the basin and splashes it all over the washstand and floor, and then he drops the towel into the ——, or anywhere rather than put it back on the horse. Bless me! Do you think I don't know a gentleman! Why, our Jack was servant in the Union fifteen years (and you know they are all up to the knocker who go there), and I have often heard him say, that he has seen a row of them press both the hot and cold taps, and fill up their basins to the brim, and then empty half of it out because it was too hot, and then fill up with cold, and empty half of it out because it was too cool, and after repeating this four or five times, get it just right and just enough. Then the floor is covered with towels, and you can't walk only over them; for three towels in the basket you find three dozen on the floor; the three are snobs, the three dozen are gentlemen. No, Bill, shopkeepers may be tidy, but gentlemen leave that to their servants."

They had both taken an easy chair, and were sat comfortably by the fire, and it began to be a deep question with the Count how he could get out, or when they would depart, for this pupil and master seemed to have a ceaseless flow of speech on their one absorbing topic.

The younger man said, "Well, I don't care how tidy mine are, for I shall have less to do."

"Which means," said George, "that you will draw nothing out of them. I always find that when any of them consider the scout's trouble, it only means considering their own pocket. I like a gentleman who drives one about and gives me no end to do, like Lord Lumps that I once had. Why, he broke both his window cords the first night he came, and next morning, because the coffee was not strong enough, he poured it into the bronze vases on the mantel-piece, and emptied the grounds on the top of the clock. I thought he was a mad customer, but I found a half-sovereign under his chair next morning, and I knew what that meant, for he never said anything about it. So I said to myself,—my Lord, you can tear everything up, and make your room into a pig-stye every night, for noble blood must do something uncommon. I was sorry when he went, I can tell you. He never knew to five pounds what money he had, and umbrellas and walking-sticks went for nothing. But now one gets only smugs. I dare say half that luggage is books and that there aren't two bottles of wine in the lot. Our English nobs think nowadays they must start to read, or else be greater fools than the national schoolmaster. If I were" ——

Here, the porter calling loudly at the lodge for George, these two worthies rose with a leisurely, aristocratic indifference to the wide world, and departed. The Count was not sorry that he had

had an opportunity of hearing two of these oily creatures make their unbridled comments on those to whom they fawn.

He had been told that Oxford was a world that none but the initiated could understand, that the life of the Dons was divinely mythological in everything except attendance at chapel and hall dinner. Was there also a mystery in the Oxford scout!

He left his room and entered the College garden, and soon forgot everything in the funereal pomp of autumn, and the tender mournfulness of its mist.

The hour of chapel came, and sweet sounds filled every solemn recess, whilst the young victims of early training and compulsory religion, listened to man's highest consolation with the indifference of stone angels—their chief angelic tribute.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT morning the Count went to call upon his tutor. When he inquired for this gentleman he received some vague directions about No. 2, second pair left, and of course not being born with the keen instincts of an office boy, he went up the wrong stairs altogether and knocking at the second door left, he found himself in the room of Mr. Swellfust. This gentleman lived in black oak luxury, surrounded with such a chaos of gigantic volumes, that he might have saved his friends funeral expenses at any particular moment. The little man looked so spectral amongst his vast tomes that the Count thought of the fable about the recording angel.

He moved his featherless wing and pointed to a chair. Then he wrote frantically a few lines—then paused—stroked his nose with his forefinger, wrote again, as that angel would have to write, if he existed, nowadays, then came the traditional pause and the mechanical application of the forefinger to the leader of his life. After the Count had taken in the artistic grouping of the room, he began to feel some wonder as to how long he would keep him waiting. He had a frightful apprehension that, if he went into a reverie

and the angel went on writing, nothing farther would transpire till the scout brought in the candles in the evening. Near him was a huge book open. It seemed to be on cockchafers, and beetles, *et omne hoc genus;* this he thought would keep him in safety. He found upon looking it was about Egyptian jewellery. Then somehow he thought of Cleopatra, then Antony with his handsome Roman face stole in, then the great Julius laid aside his sword and toned his rigid muscles down to the smile of a flirt. He was wondering whether she was as pretty as Helen. When Octavius arrived he picked up a dart to throw at him, and dragging down a pile of books, smashed a picture or two (some engravings of antiquities) that had rested on them. Ah! his Egyptian jewel had gone, and there stood before him the featherless angel, and he was rubbing his forefinger where the bridge of his nose should be. The Count made some apologies about the books. He apologized also, for what, the Count could not make out. He said, "Mr. Troyser, I suppose you wish to arrange about 'the *greats*' lectures. I shall know more about it on Monday, for I am getting out some specimens for Professor Ripetheory, and if he can prove that the Egyptian ladies were more philosophical without Christianity than ours are with it, he will lecture on that subject. To me it seems manifest from their jewellery. I think I should advise you to go, but pray, call again." There he stood stroking his nose

in triumph. What was to be done? The Count wished to explain to him that there was a little mistake, yet if he should suggest tenderly to him that he wished to know the short cut to "Smalls," he might stand filing his nose for three hours in sheer mechanism of astonishment. Still he reminded him in subdued, gentle tones, like the parson when he speaks of the country squire's sins, that he was a freshman. O that finger, that finger! It glided over the nose "swift as thoughts of love," and whistled a melody primitive as the first shepherd's pipe. At last he said, you must go to your tutor, Mr. Swig. He takes charge of all this work. Good morning, Mr. A—a—. The Count turned to go, when he advanced towards him and said rapidly, "If, sir, you should hear of any specimens of Egyptian jewellery, of which I might take copies, you would serve the cause of *humanity*, by telling me. It is the only history of obsolete religions that neither flatters nor flays its victim." Then came the astronomical conjunction of finger and nose. But the face of the man was changed. Its cadaverous paleness had softened to something nearly human, and the slumbering reflection of an ancient smile seemed to be "getting up" from his retina.

The Count tendered him his enthusiastic services and left him to feed his immortal spirit on Egyptian beetles, oblivious of time and change.

Then seeking further directions from the porter,

that august person with great condescension and some disgust, slightly explained his hieroglyphs, and the Count found the rooms of his tutor, the Rev. Steady Swig.

This official was surprised to find such an intelligent person with a handle to his name, for the Count had read classics in London with an avidity that is inconceivable, and in fact could have been a walking polyglott, as easily as smoke cigarettes, for his race had known all languages for many ages.

He inquired what he ought to do for a degree. The tutor advised that he should rather read the higher literature of any language that might interest him and never mind the routine of degree work, as examinations were to a large extent a game of hazard, and a degree could add no lustre to his position.

So the interview ended. The Count carefully concealed his lofty origin and his secret purpose of entering a profession.

The days rolled on pleasantly enough, and though he was inclined to shun society, his striking figure and mien caused much comment, and as he was regarded as an only son, people felt he ought to be rich.

Speculation was rife amongst the female offshoots of the Principal, and he was invited under any and every pretext to a dinner or a garden party. These representatives of Eve in Wooden Spoon mistook the fascination of his manners for the adoration of

sentiment, but there was some subtle power which restrained all she-gallantry and curbed even the boldest coquette.

The tutors thought he was a clever beggar and read more books than an ordinary mortal could turn over in the time. The men wondered where he *could* have sown his wild oats, as he was such a steady-going, thoughtful monster for his years. They asked him to join the only fashionable society in Oxford, known here as the "Hell-fire Club," but the name had associations, on account of which the Count declined to go further than dine with them occasionally.

But they voted that something was wrong with him, for he committed the unpardonable sin of going to St. Mary's to hear the University sermon. Young heroes, whose religion was habit and whose reverence was a minus quantity, felt that the man who did this when he might be sipping claret or champagne-cup after breakfast, had certainly some flaw in his descent or his mental constitution.

But to the Count these sermons were a dusty form of delight. The utterance of each Sunday contradicted the former, and it was astonishing to see how long people could preach without learning anything about the art of speaking. It amused him not a little to hear the monotone varied by a fierce outburst of dogma against people in the outside world, who could never know anything about it.

He had the rare advantage of seeing a good deal

of the actual life of both dons and students, and of hearing their respective estimation of each other.

He spent much time in libraries and museums. He knew more of Oxford when he had been there a month than most of its residents.

His life was ruled by that strong chain of transmitted forces which every generation forges for those that follow. And in this new life of ancient traditions and restraints he was in great danger of some fatal collision, for the only tradition he knew, was his own autocracy, and though he had witnessed restraints, he had never felt them.

His calm, unperturbed serenity showed a life that had flowed in one channel for centuries before the dawn of Chinese chronology, and made the raw British *noblesse* with whom he mingled look like painted savages with the paint chalked over, as they imitated railway navvies in drunken ululation at a "wine," or hooted round a bon-fire in the "quad," made of their own and their neighbours' clothes and furniture. Their boisterous animality jarred on the royal sensitiveness of this descendant of the most absolute and universal despotism the world had witnessed. His temper was sometimes tried on the one hand by the red tape of officials, who were such creatures of time, that they thought the moral law depended on being in one's room by the time the clock struck some arbitrary hour, and on the other hand by the raw lads whose gold made the bloated flunkeys cringe

with feigned obeisance. But he curbed his anger with iron will, for when roused, sparks of fire fell from his eyes and on his forehead there glowed a spot which told the world of his father's departed horn. He began to think that Oxford combined all the ugliness of age with the swaddling bands of infancy, and Oxford that knew him, thought he would have been a good fellow, if he had been a bit worse, but feared he would turn out a milksop after all. So that satisfaction on either side was far from general.

* * * *

Term was fast drawing to a close when he rambled carelessly after "hall" one night in the suburbs of the city.

All was serene, the blazing worlds above soothed him with their soft light, and seemed to hold out hopes of illimitable spheres of conquest, when he was called from this realm of light by the presence of some overgrown boys who were persecuting a wretchedly-clad little girl about eleven or twelve, until she wept at their coarse usage. At his presence the young brutes hung back, and without a word he quietly followed her steps till she should reach shelter. They had proceeded some distance and turned down more than one bye-street, when two knavish-looking men passed him from behind and turning full in his face said:—

"The Proctor wishes to speak to you, sir."

That eminent official came up whilst the Count was struggling with himself lest he should knock down the two faithful "bull-dogs."

"Are you a member of this University, sir?" said the gentleman in velvet sleeves and white bands.

"Yes," replied the Count.

"Your name and college, sir!" asked the Proctor.

"Flaschenbürste, of Wooden Spoon," came the ringing and haughty reply.

"Will you call upon me at 9.30 to-morrow morning at Fatsoup?" said the official, as he made some mysterious marks in a small pocket-book, as if entering an inventory of a bale of cotton or the guiding particulars of a new suit of clothes.

This was the junior Proctor, the Rev. Clothes-horse Rakeemup. His un-christian name is said to have referred to his gait and general appearance. He had been fellow of Fatsoup College for some time, and now displayed a marvellous vigilance in the aristocratic capacity of hunting with men for dogs.

Then they left him, and the Count stalked on alone, well for him that he was alone, and that it was not pitch dark, or there would have been strange rumours in that Oxford suburb, for he nearly became phosphorescent with pent-up fury at the insult.

The Proctor meantime told off one of his men to track the school-girl home, take her name and number and any particulars of her character.

CHAPTER XI.

IT was unfortunate that this little girl had been servant to the very man who had to make the report, and had left because his wife was fond of making hygienic experiments on her servants, that savoured somewhat of the story of the Irishman who got his horse to live on one straw a day.

He therefore gave a report as unbiassed and flattering as a prime minister would, if asked to write the biography of the leader of the opposition.

The Count's wrath subsided and the stars still shone, but he was sleepless, not from fear but from novelty. If the Principal of Wooden Spoon had received a new idea, his sensations could not have been more original than were those of the Count.

That he, a prince, obeying the highest instincts of chivalry, should be insulted by the oily representatives of an obsolete system, who were armed with the power to inflict a stain upon his character that nothing short of a fixed income could ever blot out, was to him amusing, and threw more light on the place and power of his mother's committee meetings and tracts, in the English nation, than aught else had done.

Next morning a note from the Proctor informed the Principal of Wooden Spoon of the highly reprehensible conduct of the Count, and asked what character he bore, &c. A singular glow suffused the features of the Principal, as if they had been newly ironed, and he grunted so emphatically, as he read the note, that an enemy would have said he took a porcine delight in its contents.

The antiquated and bearded dame who sat at the head of the table, and who had exhausted her vigour prematurely in creating family scenes and domestic cares, was astonished at the nasal ebullitions of her wedded victim, and asked for the note. A flash of radiant light suffused the region where her features used to be. There was a chance of entrapping a man so frail. At least this seems the true explanation of woman's proclivity to men who are not cold enough to be reasonable, for when the race is rational it will cease to exist. She made some remarks that I will not repeat in verbal accuracy, for she is not my mother-in-law, so why should the world know the worst?

The august Principal (for august he was out of his own family) wrote a note with the stately indifference of a young surgeon filling up the death certificate of a pauper, and made brief statements about the industry and high religious character of the Count. He felt that no harm could happen to any member of Wooden Spoon if he interposed,

for it was through his own influence that this man had been nominated proctor.

The Proctor smiled at the word "religious," for in a proctor's experience it is too impassioned to win respect, and in this particular instance the Proctor, though in orders, belonged to that new race of clergy, found only at Oxford, who speak of Christian young men with a merry twinkle, such as would sparkle in the eye of a scientific man when listening to a young lady's poem on a petrified unicorn.

With the Count all was not well. He must go in cap and gown to see this guardian of the public morals, and he hadn't one, for his third had been burnt the night before by young Lord Peppercorn, who was the leader of fashion at that period, and he had risen late and there was no time for breakfast. He attempted to borrow a gown, but they were scarce amongst his set, at Wooden Spoon. This inquiry let out the secret and roused that mixture of bullying and chaff which only a wealthy young Englishman can use. If he would say when he should be disengaged, young Peppercorn offered to be there and meet him with a "tandem" and a brass band played by women whose characters should *not* be "doubtful."

It was already half-past nine, so the Count took a cab and bought a cap and gown on the way.

The Proctor was wonderfully pleased with himself this morning, he remembered his own origin, and to

think that he held the destiny of a real Count in his hands, intoxicated him, and he only intended to ask a few questions, preach a small sermon, fine him and let him off, because he was a foreigner and could not be expected to know our customs, and continental morality had not yet dreamt of the English ideal. So he merely recounted blandly the incidents of the night before and asked—

"Do you know the female with whom you were walking last night?"

The Count replied, "That would be difficult indeed, seeing I was not walking *with* any female."

There was a volume of scorn big enough to express one's contempt of school theology in the accent with which he uttered the one word "with."

That poor Proctor looked around and about vacantly, as if in search for his dignity, and the young clear eyes were levelled at him as if a whole armoury of swords were being electrified into one *point*. Then he said, with an accent like an untimely frost,

"If you please, Mr. —a—a— Burst-Flaxen, don't bandy words with me. Do you know the girl in whose company I unfortunately found you?"

A metallic "no," was the reply.

"Do you know her character?"

"No."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"No."

"Have you seen her before?"

"No."

"Have you any explanation to offer?"

"No."

"But," said the irritated official, "I—I—I would advise you to—a—do something—a—to rectify the matter."

"The matter of such a school-child can require no rectifying," said the Count, in a stately manner; then added, "It is doubtless very unpleasant for you, but you can only proceed with your duty."

The Proctor said, "You will please call upon me at five this evening." And then he dismissed the young defiant.

He saw his colleague, the senior Proctor. He saw the Vice-Chancellor. He saw the Principal of Wooden Spoon. This worthy Principal had been put through his paces for three-quarters of an hour after breakfast, by the partner of his joys and the cause of his sorrows, and though eager for college discipline, he had pledged that no harm should come to the Count, because his "sleeping partner" above mentioned, had set not her heart—but that fossilized sponge which she kept instead of one—upon becoming mother-in-law to this hopeful young foreigner. The Count found a sumptuous breakfast awaiting him, and a few choice spirits assembled to aid his digestion, and the best-bred men of Wooden Spoon put him through a catechism, which I cannot insert,

because their sisters would be prevented from reading this biography, and I promised that it should have a fair circulation.

His answers did not furnish the amusement they expected, but on finding he had paid nothing, they insisted on his having a "drag" for the day and taking them to Abingdon or Thame. At length he appeased them and shook them off, and went and amused himself in the "Taylorian."

Five o'clock had nearly come, and he was approaching "Fatsoup College." The bells had not ceased ringing for vespers, and there was a soft charm in the early twilight which ill-prepared the Count for his interview. He had left all moral questions, with their buffoonery of human freaks, far behind, and was in that transcendental condition which has not yet been clouded by philosophy or polluted by experience. Men with a preponderance of stomach call it dreaming.

He found his way to the Proctor's rooms. A smiling fungoid piece of protoplasm in a coat received him with a half wink, and conducted him into the sanctum of this tutelary deity of girls who have not lost their virtue because they never knew what it was to be burdened by such a troublesome commodity.

The Proctor had made up his mind to release him quickly, if he could get anything like a shadow of apology or explanation. So he began by saying—

"I have seen the Principal of Wooden Spoon, who speaks so highly of your conduct that I feel there must be some mistake or accident about last night, which I think you can clear up, and save us and yourself the annoyance of appearing before the Vice-Chancellor."

Now the temptation of seeing a live Vice-Chancellor at home was too great to be passed by; and thus it stopped any possibility of an immediate explanation; he merely said, languidly—

"There can be nothing to explain, where you and your *colleagues* saw everything."

This was too much.

Poor Rakeemup lost his temper, and said, with a rigidity from which he derived his other name—

"You will call upon the Vice-Chancellor to-night at eight."

He looked at the door. The Count passed through it.

CHAPTER XII.

DINNER was lively that night in Wooden Spoon; for exagerated rumours were current about the Count and the Proctor, making, of course, the former a hero, the latter a poltroon. The wine passed freely, and the table grew uproarious, till at last Peppercorn, who had put salt in all the beer and broken all the wine glasses within his reach, let off a cracker under the table. This roused the ire of the dons at the end of the hall, and a reverend signor was sent down to quell the mutiny. Some names were taken, and some reprimands given, and the hall cleared with what despatch they could.

As eight drew near, the Count took his third journey to be initiated into the mysteries of morality. The Vice-Chancellor at that time was the venerable Dr. Pegmehigh, the head of Sawdust College. His fame in religious discovery was only equalled by his inventions in science. He was the sole patentee of the pocket Litanometer. This very novel instrument at first was invented to tell the slightest deflection of the emotions, and by a trick which only the head of a college could have found out, it served equally

to determine what might be a fit subject for prayer and what not. It could be used in any climate and on any occasion; and the smaller size was especially useful for sick rooms and death-beds. He had never married, and consequently fancied that his will was absolute. His pale locks hung about the nape of his neck, like neglected tripe; yet no autocrat in England was more absolute or arbitrary in his power.

The Count was shown into a spacious library, arranged to convey the idea of lofty thought. Whilst discussing him in another room sat the venerable trio of two Proctors and the Vice-Chancellor.

Presently the Count was ushered into a gorgeously furnished and dimly lighted room, where the three figures sat in their robes of office. The Vice-Chancellor recounted, in a suppressed mumble, the position of affairs. Here and there the Count caught a word, such as "youth," "suspicious," "decency," and then pausing, asked him, with a feeble attempt at articulation—

"What explanation can you give to mitigate the gloomy suspicions that you have raised in the junior Proctor's mind?"

The Count replied—

"She was a child, and I am not a brute."

The calm utterance of this explanation was so novel that it almost staggered the Vice-Chancellor,

and if it had been spoken in *Greek* he would have believed it.

But the recent conduct of two most distinguished British Dukes, who had sown such wild oats at Oxford that the parish authorities had every reason to complain, was so fresh in the minds of all three that the last half of the statement went for nothing.

But the senior Proctor thought he understood the drift of the remark, and said—

"Have you done much reform work? I mean, have you taught Sunday-schools, or preached in the street?"

The Count replied with an oily unction which he must have borrowed from his mother, that he had not gone so far yet.

The Vice-Chancellor asked, in a voice that reminded you of the higher notes of a penny whistle—

"What do you suppose was the age of this young person?"

The Count was growing amused and reckless, and said—

"Judging from her misery, I should say she was about seventy-five; but there was a certain undeveloped anterior contour of molecular protoplasm which would indicate that she might yet be near the consummation of her first decade."

This designed bathos was too much for the Vice-Chancellor. He rose and stirred the fire, and pre-

sented the seat of the world's highest intelligence to view.

Then his voice fell into the musical cadence of an un-oiled gate and the volubility of a rising auctioneer, as he proceeded—

"This is not quite satisfactory—not quite satisfactory. One must expect something clearer,—something sounder. There must be a basis of higher thought for all intelligent conduct. It is unreasonable to waste your time and ours—*mine*, at least—with flirtation one night and fiction the next."

When the stream ceased the Count replied, with the stately contempt of an ecclesiastical dignitary—

"If my life were such as to warrant the suspicions you invent, I should do as others in my rank, and take care that I was far enough out of the reach of proctorial supervision. I would not add folly to frailty."

The reverend autocrat hissed out his inquiries—

"What do you mean? What do men in your rank do? Is there something in Oxford of which *I* am *ignorant?* Are you a member of a secret society for the blasting of all that is fairest on earth?"

The Count was growing irritated, and his eyes began to gleam like a black girl's in the dark; but he said, with perfect hauteur—

"I am a member of no secret society. When

men in my rank wish to indulge as you suggest, they imitate Jupiter, and conceal their passion with a shower of gold. Or, in plain English, it is only a matter of a return-ticket to London, or a dog-cart for the afternoon. And it is because the accusation is so irrational that I have not troubled to make a defence, for I felt sure that *you* at least would recognize it without being told."

He then recounted the whole circumstances, and bowed with a mixture of indifference and majesty, such as a Sultan might give when he had ordered a new slave girl to be bought for his harem.

The Vice-Chancellor conducted him to another room, and returned to consult with the tutelary deities of the Oxford shop-girl.

The Count had levelled his keenest shaft in that one word "irrational," for the Vice-Chancellor had persuaded his friends, and his friends had in turn persuaded him, that he was the embodiment of reason, held together with a *little* outer coating of clay. He had formed visions that only a Persian prince, or a young milliner, who goes to bed nightly intoxicated with the last Miss Braddon, could ever hope to realize. He wished to rationalize religion. Often had he dreamt, in the cool solitude of the early dawn, of a time when men would lay aside their emotions, as already they have laid aside their tails, and all men would dwell in the beatified light of pure reason. In that future day he felt that one

form would connect that cloudless radiance with this jarring present, and that one form was the venerable figure of the Head of "Sawdust," uncharred by the breath of time. This dream had been his bride—his spouse—his family; and here was he in danger of being convicted by a beardless youth that he had not reason enough to grapple with a problem of street morality.

He sat down with a flushed face and a baked liver, and uttered a monosyllable that was meant for a question.

One Proctor said it was his first offence; the other that he was young.

They suggested that he should be "gated" at seven till the end of term (*i.e.*, not leave his rooms after that hour). But the Vice-Chancellor ruled that he should only be "gated" for four days.

This was communicated to the Count, and he departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEPPERCORN had his little joke, for there was a four-wheeler waiting outside, and Peppercorn there to take him back. The moment they were in, the cabby drove as hard as a house-agent making a bargain. And the Count discovered that Peppercorn had secreted two young ladies in the four-wheeler, who followed the most ancient profession of which we have any record, and which no law and no religion has ever closed to that sex. The Count was annoyed, and sprang from the cab at the gate of Wooden Spoon, and hurried to his rooms, and though he felt far from gay, he "sported his oak."*

For four days then he must be in by seven, and not leave his College. This was no hardship, but a haughty vengeance rose within him as he thought of his ancient house and this despicable school-boy penance.

Madame Filledful asked him to lunch, as she felt more hopeful about his future, and she wished to show that her smile was unclouded amidst the passing obloquy.

* *i.e.*, closed his outer door,—a process which secures the inmate from any possibility of intruders.

But the Count declined.

He had long felt dissatisfied with the oily toadyism of his scout, seeing that the said scout pursued his own methods with an indifference to the Count's interest, which looked in twilight like aristocratic nonchalance. And during these four days of insult, as the Count was pleased to fancy them, the scout had been particularly remiss, and on one occasion actually contradicted him. The Count kicked him down stairs.

This led to his second interview with Dr. Filledful. The Doctor uttered no reprimand, but merely expressed a pious wish that in future the Count would report any servants of the College who were negligent or saucy. Then he made some blank observations, in which shooting, wild birds, skates, and frost, were mixed up pretty much as a country squire would mix them after dinner.

But this last effort had raised the Count to the British peerage. He had invitations to breakfast from three different tutors on the same morning. The eldest Miss Filledful stood at the window all one afternoon to see his manly form pass, and spent the evening in trying to write some verses in which Apollo and Hercules had changed characters.

The Count's name was the first "toast" at every wine party that week, and Peppercorn was so filled with righteous emulation, that when the wine was over, he and another peer with two right honourables,

took each one corner of the table-cloth and shook the glasses, decanters and all, into the middle, and agitated them with gestures like those of a passionate cook, then swang *bodily*, or rather *fragmentally*, through the window—cloth and all. They next snapped all the fire-irons into convenient bits, and wrote their names with lighted fusees across the mirror.

Then a sublime nobleness settled on the group, and the blue blood of grey centuries hiccupped in pulsations through their overwrought frames.

The Count's fame was secure, and his opinion of Oxford was attaining that precocious maturity for which the family of Devils is so justly famed.

But other events were moving on, and a few days after, the Count was summoned home.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. BAMBOOZLE had written other tracts, whose success could only be measured by the circumference of the earth. Some of them had cast a ray of light on the leisure hour of the British soldier in an Abyssinian night, and others had been of service in illuminating the nocturnal raids of Australian aborigines. But ladies of withered form and evergreen fortune thronged to her committees and subscribed to circulate her literature.

The Monarch was ill, but a rich sunset of luxury flooded what seemed to be his declining days, though his horn of plenty had gone. There was a restless twitching of his fingers as he groped in vain upon the spot of his former grandeur, and sought to relieve his pent-up emotions by removing another layer of that wondrous cellular formation which graced the head of the cow that tossed the dog. A blank inanity settled on his once magnificent features, that in its harrowing imbecility and mocking distress was truly human.

Not one single descendant of his was left save the Count, so they summoned him home to the post of filial duty.

* * * *

Neither the stress of work nor domestic trial told on the gastric powers of Mrs. Bamboozle, and she was gradually acquiring that rotundity which marks a college porter, and forgot her matrimonial griefs and blisses as she mirrored her smiling face in the glass of the future, flooded with the light of success. She had just added one more to the countless number of sects, which differed mainly from its infinite number of compeers in two points. It was called "the Sacred Drumstick," and all who were admitted to its blessings, paid an entrance subscription that went to the founder. This entrance-fee was not very large, but as it was a religion for the million there remained a considerable profit, even after they had paid for flags, drums, and sanctified brazen women.

For the bishops took this movement up and threw the *crooked* respectability of their pastoral office over these silly sheep. The name of the founder may have weighed with some, others foresaw that faith in the Monarch was shaken, and one right reverend peer said, if the Church lost the Devil it would have no work left except the mob, and wittily remarked that a new miracle was taking place, for though the Devils were drowned the herd of swine remained.

In spite of the petrifying influence which is supposed to exhale from the Bench, the new sect possessed a vitality from some patent process of

Mrs. Bamboozle's that grace could nor give, nor success take away. Excesses of free grace—galvanic importations of instantaneous conversion—new home-made prayers, jabbered and yelled at every street corner, attended the triumphant progress of tamborine saints and apostolical captains, for they had barracks where they spent the late hours of the night wrestling with demons, and it was no unusual sight to see a placard headed—

BLOOD AND SUET!! COME & SEE IT!

A FREE FIGHT

WILL BE GIVEN BETWEEN

HALLELUJAH SALLY

AND

THE DEVIL WITH ONE HORN.

THEN

A NIGGER BOY

AND

A RAILWAY NAVVY

WILL TELL YOU

HOW THEY FOUND GRACE AND DREW IT WITH A

CORK-SCREW

COME AND SEE! COME AND SEE!

This new army appealed to all the old and dark instincts which belonged to the human race in its earliest struggle from apedom. Scientific men are of opinion that the popular notion of the devil arose at the period when man had acquired the erect position and learned to make small beer, and that a drunken-demi-ape it was who saw his own image in an eastern mirage—tail and all, which apparition was made the foundation-stone of all succeeding theology.

At first, people who pay their own debts said, "These are impostors, they are mad, they are lunatics." The older sects who had settled down into slobbing, sanctimonious respectabilities, said that such fanaticism ought to be put down by broomsticks and rotten eggs. But it spread like a weed.

Now if the Monarch had taken any interest in current affairs and read the morning papers, he might have seen that this singular movement was calculated to restore his empire almost to its former grandeur. But there he was with the inevitable box weighing the scales of the past and neglecting the finest opportunity of the last thousand years. You see in his failings he was grand and acted like a prime minister.

The best historians are of opinion that at this point of family life the Devils lost considerably by the marriage customs of this country, and, perhaps,

were ruined *thereby*. For the Monarch had cherished his radiant bride in that distant continent where the *cupolas* and gables of Blackingbox glowed in the never deepening twilight. She had been tender as a Houri in soft voluptuousness during the early days fragrant with bridal passion.

But once in England, she changed, as English brides ever change. Her fine gold became steel and her softest passion was a domestic diplomacy, where deceit fills all the offices of love. In his palmy days the Monarch would have taken another wife, and Mrs. Bamboozle might have soothed her chagrin by inventing new patterns for night-robes. Had he done this even now the vacant mind might have been aroused and another cycle of true Devil energy might have moved the stagnant waters of the mechanical Teuton's existence. But marriage was illegal, and he disdained the other course usually adopted by the moral Britisher.

So passed away the last opportunity. The fortune of the whole house seemed drifting into the committee meetings of Mrs. Bamboozle and her peers.

Nearly all sects, save this last of blood, thunder, and tambourines, were preparing to put out the fires of their own private hells, and the future world was growing quite an attractive young lady with a graceful figure. Preachers in country chapels no longer carried lucifer matches in their pockets to practice the well-known stage trick of showing the

colour a human soul would take as it burned in a slow blue Forever.

Owing, no doubt, to vivisection and the electric light, a gentler future was dawning on the world, and stray cats and lunatics were better provided for.

Soon Christmas Day appeared, and the Devil tasted his first plum-pudding. He no longer wondered that the religion of the country was of a heavy and substantial kind. It made him thoughtful, for though the numerous days of festivity at first amused him, he preferred the life at Blackingbox, where time had but one wave, or if you measured it at all, it was by the hour-glass, whose sand was a burning delight.

The Count spent his days in voracious reading and long conversations with the Monarch.

New Year's Day had come and carried its follies into the drunken limbo of the past. Vacation ended, and once more he left for Oxford.

The old Monarch gazed upon him intently, almost tenderly, and his gray eyes seemed to dilate into endless vistas of the past.

The Count left him, with profound respect and melancholy, for his heart sickened at the mad mutability, which in our mockery we call life.

CHAPTER XV.

MIDST the mud and fog of a January day the Count entered Oxford, not young—hopeful—as a few weeks before: the past seemed to have drifted away as a cloud from a mountain peak, and all that remained was gray, immovable and old. During his first term he had seen many phases of Oxford life and read them as by an electric flash. This home of all the nobler sentiment, and this birthplace of more than one religion, where culture slumbers in the lap of history and romance, and the dome of her temple rests on the polished pillar of inutility, had often lost its sparkle and its grandeur in the darkness of mean reality. He had seen her services gorgeous without worship—he had heard her religious teaching in its sweet unity, attractive as a withered corpse that kind hands have hidden with flowers, their only unity being flowers of rhetoric—he had heard her professors snigger in fictitious pity at the shallow pretensions of their brethren—he had witnessed the gentlemanly and Christian self-sacrifice and courtesy with which any vacant post was filled up; the learned feelings on all such occasions had the placid serenity of jealous women or rival cabbies.

But though the glitter was gone and the dream had vanished, he thought at least he could find the best teaching of a technical kind, so he mapped out a term's course of lectures, of a more varied type, than any one student since the days of Socrates. Three of his favourite professors, however, advertised that they could not lecture that term. Five others, whose celebrity was known to all men, and whose stipend was the admiration of a select few, lectured to three men each. Two others, whose books sold from Barrow-in-Furness to Yokohama, had two persons to attend their lectures, the Count himself and a pale-faced woman in blue goggles. After the second lecture the woman stayed away, and then Professor Windwave asked the Count to breakfast.

A real Oxford breakfast is a thing to remember with mystery and affection long years after, when the wash of life's struggling tides leaves the wormwood dregs of yesterday to embitter the morning cup.

In the feverish strife of middle age, when a man is galloping to death in order to live, the recollection of a student breakfast seems as remote as the union of Christendom. Under the spell of such memories a man is inclined to shake himself, and feels that he ought to ask a friend whether he is more given to monomania than his neighbours. For such a breakfast is the banquet of all that life can give. There meet youth, and health and hope, the east wind of experience has not nipped every budding sentiment;

and though black care may be on his horse, he has not yet arrived. The whole attendant surroundings are like the pearly glitter that garnishes dawn, and it seems that the young life can never lose its amber light in the gloom of disappointment and despair.

Such breakfasts the Count knew well, but he had not met those birds of prey who are not supposed to care for the early worm, but rather to rake at the midnight hour in sepulchral tomes, or dig down to the roots of words, if haply they may find a deposit which marks the deflection of some obsolete insect. He almost looked forward to a new order of life, and he was amiably inclined to welcome anything, for since his return he had got weary of hearing only discussions of fox terriers and football.

He was received with great dignity, and an attempt at magnificence that almost provoked a smile. He had often been struck with the fact that amongst resident Oxonians there is no aristocracy. Everywhere it is middle-class life curdling into fantastic shapes. True the female impedimenta of some college don did occasionally come to think that they were the leaders of European fashion, but this ignorance was only another proof of the danger there is from infectious diseases.

But the Count was soon at ease, and Professor Windwave knew all the leading people in Europe whose success in life rendered them worth knowing. Windwave was of somewhat striking exterior. The

tradition was that Mrs. Windwave had indulged her girlish fancies, and woven her woman schemes, simply to secure a front seat for her husband's brilliant genius, for only by its light did she expect to be visible in this world of giant shadows.

The Professor was triumphant and sparkling, a new edition of his last book had been called for, and the Count possessed the rare faculty of being able to understand something besides "torpids" and steeple-chases. He was now a severe student, and sought for information like a new Encyclopædia, and Windwave knew a bit of most things outside of his professional subject. He was great at drainage, and had invented an apparatus for photographing sewage gas, which is said to produce powerful negatives. He had also pushed his researches in language down to the origin of sound, which he expressed mathematically, and classified nations like an addition sum, according to their range of numbers in sound. He is writing a large volume on ethnology as revealed by phonetics. He could give you the square root of a squeal, or express a sob as a decimal fraction of a laugh. He believed that the original vowel sounds of the whole human family were still retained in the soothing midnight song of the cat, from which he inferred that the cat was the earliest animal that had ever associated with man, and had caught its language from him in the first stage of its simplicity. He had practised the three stages of an

ordinary mi-ee-aw so thoroughly that one night, as he paced up and down in front of his house with a German professor, lost in the wild delight of this simple solution, he gave a full-chested example of the "three stages," and the housemaid on the third storey emptied the vials of her water-jug on his best beaver.

After this he kept a cat and used to work it by the tail, which he called speaking from the heart. He persuaded all his children to believe this theory, and, as they were girls, they all kept cats.

All this was highly amusing to the Count. And the Misses Windwave sparkled over their coffee, like true sea-waves in the sun, but the Count knew well that these bright spots were only so many "cats-paws," the gay heralds of some future storm. Yet they were clever girls, and could do most things, from annotating Aristophanes to slicing up a curate.

The Count wrote in their album a clever verse from "the hunting of the Snark," full of soap-suds and tears. Then the Professor and he arranged that there should be no more lectures that term, and he departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

FEW mornings after the refreshment of wind and wave, the Count came out of his bed-room and found Lord Peppercorn utilizing the fried bacon and fresh butter to induce the fire to burn.

This noble Lord was in great danger of being invited to "migrate" to a Hall. He knew considerably less than when he matriculated, which fact alone would suffice to establish the doctrine of "degeneration" in the animal world, for nothing short of a change of tissue could have brought it to pass. He had collided with the proctorial powers often, which had led him to the re-adjustment of the relativity of some half sovereigns.

He pitied the Count, and thought what cowardly beggars these foreigners must be, to allow one interview with the "Vice" to convert him. And he was always railing at the books he read, and had asked him if he meant to be a national schoolmaster, and in other ways showed his encouragement of learning.

This morning he shouted—"Now, your noble augustness, do you know you are going to be indicted for manslaughter?"

"I was not aware of any such intended honour," said the Count. "Is the Antivivisection Society on my track? For yesterday morning we put to death four young chickens by boiling them alive."

"Do you mean you had a cock-fight in your own room? You are a churl not to let one see the sport."

"I tell you we *boiled* them—they were in their shells—their life was only in its *dawn*, and that is miles off feathers, probably in the bi-segmented stage, but they were alive and we murdered them."

"That accounts for the old lady, who wears *male* boots, being seen under your window this morning."

But it is something much worse than that. You nearly killed the "Boss" and the whole family of Filledful. It seems that about 2 A.M. the old boy was making a charity sermon and wanted a book out of the library on hieroglyphic wind instruments, or whatever it is in that pile there. The old boy had left all the doors open, and one of them blew to with such a bang that the old dame woke up, in curl papers and a blue fright. Her teeth did not chatter because they were in a glass of water on the table. She had just found a pair of bellows in the dark, when her "hubby" returned, and left the sermon till he should find more information. The old lady shied the bellows the moment the door opened, and the two wind instruments met nose to nose. They say he could not go to chapel this morning. What a

hardened creature you must be to sit there eating breakfast, when a whole family has been reduced to a state of great —— relief! Now look here, promise me that you will drop this snobbish habit of reading and I will take you in a 'tandem' every day this week."

The Count smiled at this last sentence, which was the key to all the rigmarole that had preceded.

After wasting two hours he got rid of the idle peer and read till it was time to go to his one lecture, given by one man to one other. For Professor Creeper never lectured oftener than the statutes required, and never lectured less. He was very near-sighted, and an audience was by no means necessary for his oratory. As a college fellow he had been known to lecture to well-arranged caps and gowns, whilst the owners were enjoying the fresh morning hour outside.

And now he would take an historical survey of crumbling empires or reeking carnage, with the leisurely indifference of an over-fed spider on a summer afternoon.

The Count found these lectures useful, for Creeper had amassed an astonishing amount of information, and dried it so thoroughly that he seemed to have no trouble to keep it, and no desire to part from it.

In fact his term, to any one who has not acquired the faculty of reading, would have been remarkably dull. He had made the acquaintance of a few other

professors, and listened to some single lectures that were dry enough to dispel the illusion that climate has any influence on the human brain—or at any rate its fruit. But when these failed, he found the Professor useful to indicate what books he should read on his favourite subjects.

His term was summed up in the one sentence—he read. And this is the history of some hundreds who enter Oxford with a fair prospect of becoming men—and leave it machines. For in no place in the world's history was there ever so much reading and so little education.

It is true the Count had spent some time at Mrs. Filledful's at-homes and at an occasional dinner, and they had been salutary as seasons of perfect intellectual rest.

But at the earliest possible date he hurried home, for the news of the Monarch was very unfavourable.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COUNT found a manifest change in the Monarch, and towards the close of March, in all the brilliancy of a premature springtide, it was felt that his end was near. A lovely serenity had come to him, and that keen intellect was not clouded. Then for the first time the Count learnt to form some adequate idea of that power which had governed an empire. Wondrous lights seemed to play on his features, like the mellowed memories of youthful sunshine.

All the blackening and deforming subjectivities of every nation which had been cast upon him, and which had distorted his position and purpose on earth, were rolled back and forgotten. He was capped in a truly royal sublimity.

The Count talked with him hour by hour. There were many family secrets kept from the Count, and he had thought it best for his own happiness not to inquire into them. But now he grew bolder, and eagerly asked about the distant time of the Monarch's childhood, and the golden period of his greatest pomp. When he knew the truth, filial tears blinded

those brilliant young eyes. Fable and falsehood, priestcraft and prejudice, had practised their enormities and fabricated their phantasmagoria, and told the world that these were the daily acts of the Monarch, till from sheer self-preservation he became the despot whose power was death.

There was one burning question the Count longed to ask but feared to do so. He felt he could not possibly know the true cause of the decline and fall of his family from any one but the Monarch himself. Yet he feared to ask, lest it should seem like an accusation.

For some days he thought of this, and this only; then, as he perceived the Monarch grew weaker and his own brain reeled under the pressure and excitement of the dark mystery, he seized the first lucid interval and led him gently to the subject.

A singular shadow passed over the worn face—it seemed like an accusing shade; then he whispered, "We were ever receivers."

It sounded like an oracular response from the innermost recess of life's only shrine. The Count wanted a priest and an interpreter.

But the Monarch was too weak to say more.

Friends had gathered round, wakened from their callous and jaunty indifference, as only death can wake them.

Mrs. Bamboozle was humanized into a subdued

bridal tenderness, and thought she felt that the world was hollow and her dreams were tinsel, in the overshadowing presence of life's deepest certainty.

Thus the Monarch died.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONLY those familiar with the spasms of English history can comprehend the chaotic revulsion and contradiction that passed over the nation when the news of the Monarch's death was published. Admiring friends, who had neglected him when alive, clamoured for a national funeral. A great king had died, and they felt that our most venerable Abbey was the only fitting place in which the royal dust could repose. A deputation waited upon the Prime Minister. They found that he had wreathed his gray hat in crape as a tribute to the departed Monarch. This illustrious politician was also a great theologian, and he had ever believed in the Monarch. He regretted that he had not written a post-card to the father of theology during his late afflictions. He felt that it was singular to bring the Devil amongst the patriots and preachers of all generations; but he thought there was probably great fitness in such an arrangement, and he hoped that such a bull would greatly appease the troubles in Ireland. He quoted several square feet of Homer, and ran through many linear yards of Ovid, to find a fitting epitaph.

The Prime Minister's approbation virtually settled

the matter, the necessary arrangements were proceeded with, and the date of the funeral fixed.

When the day came the March wind seemed to stand at ease, and the sun smiled on the crowding pageantry. The remains were conveyed down the Thames. Both banks of that ancient river were thronged with a countless multitude; many stout men shuddered and women fainted as the stately *barge* floated by. At Westminster they had placed a cannon to fire the royal salute and proclaim to the world that there was no more hell.

Peers bore the pall, and the priest who for many years had disbelieved in the Monarch now read his funeral service, while that galaxy of genius and beauty stood in breathless awe, till they seemed to be congregated shades filling that venerable mausoleum.

London reeled with excitement. Every paper wrote a life of the Monarch. Special correspondents sent pen-and-ink sketches of the ruins of Blackingbox.

More than one London paper tried to persuade the nation that it had predicted this event some years before, and that the account they read of yesterday's proceedings had been in type ever since.

The Times caught the infection, and, to wipe out the blot of its past indifference to royal personage, wrote a fulsome article and called him "the grand old man."

This furnished an element of sensation and waggery to political circles and London clubs, and an effervescent young lord is said to have sent his wife to Downing Street for the late premier's shoes, saying he thought they would fit him, for though he knew no theology, he was Church.

Equally singular mistakes were made by almost every newspaper. They all agreed in representing him as the last of his line, and spoke with some horror of the Royal Bachelor and the last years of his desolate life. *The Young Ladies' Journal*, and *The Family Friend*, said: "His *premature* death was doubtless a punishment from that heaven which originally made one flesh in two parts."

These moral lessons were felt deeply, and some people began to take in *The Matrimonial News*.

But so few knew the real secrets of his life, that no allusion was made to Mrs. Bamboozle, except as a devoted married housekeeper, who would now have to face a London struggle to bring up her small family. That estimable person was therefore surprised by receiving some bundles of third-hand small clothes and notes of sympathy with her and her numerous offspring.

Everywhere the news produced conflicting emotions, as gradually it spread to every hamlet and home. To some classes it brought little relief. It merely confirmed their former conclusions, but to the down-trodden, the weary, and the heart-broken,

who had found the load of life too heavy and the horror of the future overwhelming, it came like a stream of living water through the burning sand where they were dying.

Then arose a jubilee. The earth seemed clad as with new pageantry, and joy dawned in the garb of immortality. The fever and horror of existence, under which men had howled and moaned as if in nightmare, fled before this breath of light. Waves of brightness chased each other along the course of human destiny and the grave swallowed them up no longer. It was like the burst of a radiant vision on a world which had bowed beneath intolerable burdens, and pined in the darkness of doubt, till every feeling was benumbed with icy horror.

Have you ever wandered in the fresh morning air, in scenes of loveliness near a classic city, when all things were transfigured by your own exalted mood —when the common wild flowers seemed to sparkle with suffused sentiment, when the early shadows had not deepened into pensiveness, when the wavelets of the winding river glanced in the bright light like tiny eyes beaming with admiration, when the topmost spires of the ancient city sparkled in the sunshine, while below hung a slight mist, as if the breath of antiquity was weaving a pall over the mouldering walls, the matin bells still sounding, whilst in the branches over head wake the impassioned strains that are passionless? Have you

trodden this scene with lover or friend? Have you felt that in a few hours, in the very heart of that city, which is the home of culture, you shall play a conspicuous part when genius and beauty are assembled to greet each other?

Then can you know something of the flooding transport of new life, which now filled countless hearts with ecstasy.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERHAPS never in the world's history was such a sensation as on the Sunday following this funeral.

It was not so much the laying aside an obsolete creed. This the world had grown accustomed to. Councils had met and slain both the opinions and the persons of their opponents, and clauses that had convulsed nations and left chasms between churches that centuries have failed to bridge over, had crept in by the accidental superiority of the Court party, or the mere freak of a recently converted barbarian king. But here was a new constructive element. Religion seems to have originated from fear and hope, and to our puny race, covered with clouds of ignorance, the mighty mysteries that surround us took phantom forms, then they breathed, then they were potent, and at last they were destinies before which all men bowed and shuddered.

Now a great being had passed away—a mortal creature like themselves—a time-shadow, only a little longer than the rest—but upon him whole peoples and generations had cast their own subjectivities, until he towered aloft in the accumulated grandeur and awe of every fleeting age.

Now that he was gone, a new hope rose from the sarcophagus of the human race. Destruction was self-consumed, and in its ashes was seen the germ of the tree of life. Henceforth men would not sit, like the three sisters of fate, weaving the thread of doom for succeeding generations, but their highest efforts should glow on the banners of progress or glitter on the fair arches of triumph.

Dimly the moralist and the preacher realized what had taken place. In many cases habit prevailed over knowledge, and grotesque blunders shocked the pious mind.

The mechanical hawkers of the religious emotions solidified rose to utter their cry about the prowling lion seeking whom he may devour, and told their hearers to resist the ——. But it was publicly known that he was dead. Some men who knew their sermons by heart, forgot and used his name, which was received with a jubilant yell that his coffin had floated down the Thames.

In churches with a fixed liturgy they used his name as reverently as before, but this produced no shock, for they were so accustomed to unmeaning phrases.

One earnest-minded seer, who had long seen the loveliness of religion, and who had mourned the wasted energy that men spent to perpetuate struggle and honour, ascended his pulpit radiant with satisfaction, and taking for his text, "Old things are passed

away," said, "I have long told you it must come and that the fictions of former dark ages would pass away. You have lived to see the death of the Devil, and if you cleanse your eyes, and your lives, you may yet live to see the dawn of religion. For men have been paying attention to the Devil during countless ages, either by adoration, or fear, or libel, whilst religion folded her pure wings and wept at the follies of men. Lay aside your material foulness and go to that radiant Being for your creeds, and you will find them a tissue of light and consolation. They rest on no pillars of horror, you see no flashing swords of eternal vengeance whose special delight is to make widows and orphans. But they are the pure and the purifiers—their tender life floats in fragrance, silent as stars move and violets grow—they devour, as it were food, the brutishness of man, in order to give back to the world *itself*. And when all that is dark and loathsome has vanished, these creeds rooted in immutable light, will bear their earliest flowers of odorous love, such as poets have not yet dared to picture."

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. BAMBOOZLE was now again a widow. Her grief had subsided into respectability and her crape was stiff with crystallized sorrow. This public funeral had at first disconcerted her plans. She feared she would be too well known. A new tract had to be entirely re-written, for I blush to say that she had made very free use of her husband's family name. It was a tract written for recitation and ending with a solo set to tambourine music. She got a dowager duchess to send pastoral epistles to all the barracks, begging them not to believe the story of the dead Devil, for notwithstanding the funeral and fuss, it was only her eldest son that was dead, and a monster he had been to her, though he was of royal descent on his father's side. These moral scavengers did as they were told, and one night, when the hallelujah lasses had wrestled with the unseen, till "happy 'Liza" swooned in graceful and triumphant ecstasy, a costive-looking shoemaker jumped on a form and shrieked, "He's gone through the keyhole. The Devil's gone through the keyhole." They made him a captain at once, and he was sent through the length and breadth of England to tell what he had seen with his own eyes.

Mrs. Bamboozle's committees were in consternation. the "Religious Trash Society" summoned a hasty meeting to consider what they should do with their obsolete literature, for much of it was, in a literal sense, so Devilish, that they feared their solemn warnings would sound like fairy tales. It is the punishment of an avenging providence, that false gods deteriorate to butterflies and gossamers as they float downward into dust.

"The Society for the Propagation of Cats and Dogs in Foreign Parts" soon found they had a deficit. Because those people who try to atone for trampling upon their Christian brethren by introducing rum and paper collars to the notice of unsuspecting Blacks, now ceased to give, as there was no longer any Devil for them to fear. And disorganizing secretaries found the victims for foreign exportation fewer, and some of these pious ambassadors even went so far as to ask, "What is the use of disturbing natural and serene Black if we have not a fresh Devil to take them?"

In these committees Mrs. Bamboozle was greatly assisted by one Mr. Cubbard, an M.P., and a bright and shining light on all points respecting "the permanent curate," especially his mental powers and his sexual passions. How Mr. Cubbard knew all this, was darkly hinted at by his friends, who suspected it to be one of those instances where sympathy had first directed the subject to the object,

and where a long experience had filled up the rest. In short, that it was "like to like." But this mattered not. He was an M.P., and he gave large donations to ecclesiastical purposes. He often spoke at church congresses, and met with the loud applause of the entire assembly, whilst he laid the lash on the absent defenceless curate, and made jokes about love and cradles, and drew a fancy portrait of the affectionate young parson who fancied he was in the arms of his bride, when really it was the embrace of poverty. And on one occasion he went so far as to exhort them to be priests indeed and *live like* soldiers and sailors who did not marry! What moral teaching for a reverend assembly to split their sides over!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE few remaining days of the Count's vacation seemed endless to him. For in every waking hour he pondered the mysterious words of the dying Monarch. On one of these days, Mr. Sliver, a Cabinet Minister, famed for good works and Sunday-school organization, called to offer consolation and help to his mother. Mrs. Bamboozle was engaged in trying to palm off a few mildewed tears on the President of the Methodist Conference, for she wished that inexorable gentleman to prevent the Conference from passing a vote of condolence with the Monarch's widow. If they should publicly announce the death of the Devil, her literature would stagnate and her funds and her pride would be moth-eaten.

Whilst this discussion took place the Count was endeavouring to be agreeable to the M.P. Mr. Sliver was a man with a history and was said to have made a fortune by supplying oakum to the criminal classes. In the Cabinet and out of it, no man ever deciphered Mr. Sliver's opinions. He had written a handbook containing all the terms of diplomacy and every innuendo that could contradict a statement without denying it. The effect of all this

mystery and disguise had earned him a reputation for astutenes in every political circle in Europe.

He spoke so tenderly of the late Monarch, and listened with such statuesque intelligence, that the Count ventured to ask if he could throw any light on the mysterious utterance. The M.P. lost a wrinkle as one broad wave of counterfeit surprise swept over his bellows-like brow, and he said, softly, "You must have slightly misunderstood the King's reply."

"Yet," said the Count, "it is a complete sentence, and he could as well have said the word he wished to utter."

"I have no doubt," replied Sliver, "he did say the word he wished to utter, and if you were not his son, I think it would have occurred to you long ago. I admire your filial feeling. It is graceful, and heaven knows there is but little of it left in this country. Some day you will see it."

Then the diplomatist dexterously turned the conversation to the University Boat Race, and Derby, the late epidemic amongst bishops, &c., all of which seemed to come as naturally as early potatoes. When he ceased the Count led him back to the old question, and begged that he would confer the favour of an explanation. The M.P. winced, as if he was taking an extra dose of curtain lecture, but said blandly, "Alter one letter and you have the traditional history of your house. Yours was always

a political family and politicians, because they who drive the mob with invisible reins are always called *deceivers*." He smiled triumphantly as if he had annexed a province or annihilated a race of barbarians, and was waiting for a baronetcy, as the reward of his genius.

A shiver of chagrin and disgust shook the Count. For if that was all, there was little light thrown on the stupendous fall of his father's power, and nothing gained, except a warning voice that in the approaching ages the whole civilization of both hemispheres would fade into rags, to amuse the idle days of the few naked savages that would be left, as lords of the earth, for is not every known system of civilization an organized piece of jugglery by which the lucky few cajole the miserable mob through the darkness of life to the light of death?

The President left, and the M.P. yielded himself to the pleasing witchery of Mrs. Bamboozle's smile.

The Count wandered forth somewhat disconsolate, for his disappointment was keen, to have fancied he had caught a drop from truth's well, and to see it burst as a bubble.

Over and over he wrote fool on the inner tablet of his heart and heeded little whither he went, till he found himself near the Abbey. He entered and gazed on the Monarch's grave, as yet unmarked by any memorial. Struggling tides swept through his being, and the waters of life seemed to dash on the

bleak cliffs of doom. Everywhere he was hampered and fettered. A stranger in a strange land, his position unknown, his nature not understood, the wild lightning of his being threatened to strike down the barriers of this foreign civilization. The death of the Monarch had moved him, beyond all calculation, and now that he stood in this charnel-house of glory, he yearned for one whisper of the past to assure him that there was a life whose bounding pulsations were no longer the muffled tramp of mutability. If life, and success, and power, and glory, were only the accidents that marked the different stages of the fever of this momentary dream, then truly the only wise and the only noble were those who blotted out the past and blurred the future by the round of pleasure and the revel of folly. Yet such a supposition turned the history of those sleeping generations into a mocking masquerade that vanished, as a ray of sunlight fell on the sanctity of that surrounding repose.

He yielded his soul to mighty aspirations and strained his gaze to decipher the hieroglyph of being.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COUNT had fallen asleep the night before balancing the two words, "receivers," "deceivers."

But without being able to assign a reason, he awoke feeling that the Monarch said and meant to say "receivers." And on this assurance he determined to prosecute his inquiry and search for the hidden meaning.

He lingered over breakfast with his mother, hoping to draw her into a conversation about her girlhood and her early married life, and thus get to know what she could give by way of information on the long line of Kings to which she had been allied. But, as usual with their conversations, it yielded no profit. The two were so different in character that any discussion was a mutual irritation. She had told him again and again that he did not take after her family, that he was a Devil, and that there was a savage earnestness about him, which suited well enough the climate of Blackingbox, but was out of place in religious civilization.

It was Sunday morning and the Count thought he should gain repose by a long ramble in the country. So he took a ticket for a station some twenty miles

away, and then walked in the keen wind. He might have gone some seven or eight miles when he entered a quaint little village, and had internal monitions that it was lunch time.

He found a wretched little inn, but the good-natured people, mingling hospitality with their trade, offered him part of their dinner. Of this he partook, and spent some time in talking of the neighbourhood, of themselves, of their children, and felt an amount of interest that he had not experienced for many weeks.

Then he left this simple form of life, which a peer's butler would consider fifty thousand years behind his own civilization.

As he wandered through the village, he saw a few straggling people, mostly old, and in attire that seemed like the faded misfits of many generations; these people disappeared in one and the same building. The building itself looked like a well-windowed stable, belonging to no order or style of architecture yet discovered.

It was in fact the village chapel.

The Count followed with the rest, and created a little consternation amongst the plain people who noticed his entrance.

But presently they sang a hymn with great fervour, and the leader of the movement, who was shut up in a little elevated box, as if to be raised above competition, then began a singular address to the Deity,

in which he spoke in flattering terms of the sun, moon and stars, and many curiosities beneath them, then he ran through a series of typical cases to set forth the needs of his audience, and finally summoned the Almighty to come and prove the truth of His own words. A good deal of fellow-feeling pervaded the audience, and they grew especially exuberant about the expected proof.

To the Count at first it seemed like a training school for emulation in impromptu blasphemy, but he discovered that it was far otherwise. For these poor people were groping in their darkness to find the Eternal Entity, for which he himself yearned, and were in fact far more hopeful in their quest than he himself was.

Another hymn was sung. A sermon followed, wide in its range, if not deep. Ludicrous in some details, but full of sober earnestness on the one question of eternal life.

After the sermon there was a baptism. Then for the first time it occurred to the Count that he had not been baptized. He shrunk from an elaborate ceremony, and here there was so little that religion might almost be said to be unclothed.

When the meeting ended and the chapel was almost empty the Count asked the preacher if he could be baptized. The preacher seemed more than astonished at this singular proposal, but of course assented. When the momentary rite was over, the

Count thought there must be some fee in this commercial country, but the preacher said no, unless he wished for a certificate. Then he produced a black bag (for he was a "travelling preacher") and took out a book in which, after a long struggle with the Count's name (which had been bad to pronounce, but was perfectly impossible to write) he entered all particulars and charged his usual sevenpence.

The Count took the wonderful document and departed, marvelling at the economy of folk religion.

His mind had been diverted and he walked back to the station in a mood less sombre than in the morning.

In a few days after this event, Oxford term began, and the Count left Mrs. Bam to the consolation of Cupboard and Committees.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AS soon as the Count arrived at Oxford, he visited the Bodleian and made a selection of many books on life, empires, religions, hoping by this means to read his riddle.

On Sunday he went to many services but found no change in them. It seemed that Oxford was the only place to which the news of the Monarch's death had not spread. Elsewhere the fountains of joy gushed forth, young children said their evening prayers without terror, and the aged and dying learnt a new lullaby for anguish and death as they sat by the cradle of this new-born hope. But the Oxford machine worked with such precision that it took a century to wind it up and give it a new deflection. Opinions that stirred the depths of society elsewhere, were generally fossils by the time they excited the curious admiration of the hooded apostles of stereotyped culture.

There were of course exceptions. One notable rector, who was like the Monarch in the fact that he possessed a *horn*, groaned audibly and raved like a sea captain giving his orders in a storm, because the nation, in wanton school-boy folly, had deprived

itself of spiritual gymnastics, by declaring that there was nothing bad except rates and taxes.

Then the rector of Fourways Church had long been silently preparing his flock for this beatific change. He had begun to preach a course of sermons to prove that hell had nothing to do with matches, but after the first, a deputation of married men had waited upon him and so emphatically proved to the contrary, that he changed the title, when they were printed and proved that hell had nothing to do with fusees, which some people thought was meant for a pun. There is a rumour that he arrived at the conclusion that hell-fire does not exist, because there is an Aldermanic pew in his church which does not smell of brimstone, and he knew it would if such an article blazed for ever in Satan's home, and when he had put out the fires of hell he had but little trouble to turn out the Monarch. Judging from the funereal aspect of the service it seemed as if he was rather sorry than pleased, now it had come to pass.

Monday morning was very much taken up by those formalities which form the groundwork of all the higher civilizations. The Count had seen Dr. Filledful and his tutor, the Rev. Steady Swig, and shaken hands with some half-score of the men, then he was free.

For days he read with lightning rapidity. His purpose was to find some fixed factor that was common to life, empire and religion, and then apply

this one factor to unravel the mystery of the dying Monarch's utterance.

It would take no small volume to give, even in outline, any idea of the stupendous task he found it.

Book after book on life had to be put away, for they were all written on some accident of life, and he was looking for life itself, or at least its differentia and not its clothes. All the usual points of agreement, such as that life cannot enter upon the world without an introduction, that all material life is viscous in its primary stage, that motion is invariably present in some part of its history, that it can always be destroyed, that it can never be recalled, were treated as such transparent accidents that they were at once passed by. Then in the higher orders of life, there were consciousness, volition, pain. But consciousness might be only a form of expressing limitation. Volition was a defect rather than a benefit, for to perfect beings volition is not. Pain is the mere correlation of pleasure, and, at least in a world of matter, as necessary as the concave is to the convex.

Life itself seemed to recede farther from view in his investigation, and he was about to leave this branch of his inquiry in its native darkness, when a stray book by a modern philosopher, also a London surgeon, opened out a new path, and suggested that life, as we usually speak of it, is but a limitation of vaster force; in fact, is no life at all, but a struggle

of mutable molecules coerced into that dance which we call activity—that true life was the life of the mountain and the earth, of planets and stars. That we were in ever varying forms of deadness—*i.e.*, of receptivity. Life was that which gave all. These phenomena which we see and are, were but *receivers* of the broken fragments from the All-giver.

This then seemed to indicate a possible cause of decay. It also seemed to explain why the human race had danced backwards and forwards on its desert of sand, and called this gyrating mutability—progress.

He next turned to empire. Here the matter was simple, for it was limited, and to some extent tangible. The older dynasties were pressed into his service, especially those which had any clear account of their origin, and which all men owned had failed. At first they were vigorous, beautiful, and beneficial; then they stagnated, decayed, became loathsome.

Now was this a natural result of limitation from without, such as binds the development of the daisy and the cowslip, or did it arise within these governments because they failed to preserve their normal adjustment. Flowers and fruit perforce reach their limitation, become ripe, and finally must rot. But though empires are frequently rotten, they are never ripe. He applied the great principle of the grander life of the universe to those smaller cycles of life, and

found that so long as they were beautiful and beneficial they were the *givers*, but the stages of their putrefaction could always be measured by the preponderance of their receiving. At the beginning government gave shelter, protection, order; then, when generations had passed, and a fair and fruitful prosperity gave promise of a rich harvest of loveliness, some other governors began to prey on the fair work of their fathers, they gave nothing and received much. The flame whirlwind passed over it, and the harvest-field was known only by the blackened track that remained. Then the politician said that that nation had had its day—it was played out; and theologians fabricated a special providence to account for a change in the puppet-show. Yet even placemen admitted that despotism was a curse, and must pass away. Still, what is a tyrant but one who receives all and gives nothing? and in some vague position between the tyrant and the benefactor may be ranked all political factions and every cabinet minister.

Here then, as before, *death* arose from *receiving*, *life* luxuriated in *giving*.

He next turned to religion. Hitherto religion had been adopted with the country of his residence. He had imitated the men among whom he lived, and worn his religion with the careless ease of a fashion that is stereotyped. In his native home it was unknown except as a mechanical force to

increase political power. The accounts of the most effete systems were a dull catalogue of darkness so unmeaning that their ribald gods almost ceased to be grotesque.

But the earliest records of the rise and spread of Christianity enthralled him with their fascination. The life and character of the Founder revealed to him a power and a beauty that enchanted him by the simplicity of its victorious vitality.

Here, and here only, of all the religions that have dazzled or degraded man did he find the *All-giver*. The lowly Nazarene received from the world nothing, but gave it everything. His religion in its peace and purity flowed a fertilizing wave of life through the blackened wreckage of expiring creeds, that sweltered only in the mud of despair and degradation. Its spread and progress was the triumph of a vitality that could wreathe the gibbet of the martyrs and the schools of philosophy with festoons of ever-green loveliness.

We cannot understand or realize the emotions with which for the first time he viewed the loveliness of this religion. All the yearnings of his susceptible and profound nature trembled beneath this wave of apocalyptic light. What he knew of Christianity before he had learnt from precision of a set service, or the cackling negation of drawing-room theology. To him it had been a lovely fossil, protected by the point of the sword, because men felt vaguely that it

once possessed a charm, which they dare not incur the risk of breaking.

For hours he pondered on this mystery. Life no longer spread her wings to fly from a decaying world, but, like a radiant child, walked through her mouldering dynasties to plant flowers on their ruins. The history of the race became transfigured. Immortality had already laid the foundations of her temple on that experience, which is cemented by the butchery, the failure, and the deformity of every human system the world has witnessed.

He began by seeking to understand the utterance of the dying Monarch; he had found an answer to his own deepest yearnings—he began by seeking the causes of decay; he had found the message of life written on the leaves of time, which whispered him that decay was the new sepulchre which every generation hewed for itself.

Let man once desire to *give* as he who desires to *have* and deformity would reel away from a radiant world, and dying men, who strangle each other in their struggle for the bubbles of wealth, power, position, would lose their putrefaction in the lustral waves of self-forgetfulness, to be clad in that beauty which flashes in the silent and secret Forever.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MRS. BAM was exceedingly busy. The list of her engagements increased like an unpaid butcher's bill. In spite of herself and in face of all her own conduct, where every counterfeit shone like reality, she almost believed that her devoted band offered her sincere sympathy. Certainly the married men of the initiated had expressed sentiments that would have seemed a little too warm and a little too real for those bundles of faggots which the law called their wives. But, as Mrs. Bam had an infinite store of smiles, and also preserved the rare art of being able to imitate a maidenly blush at least once every twenty-four hours, each of these male maggots fattened on the east wind, whilst he thought that he had a private elysium all to himself.

But the case of the married women was far otherwise. They were so eaten up with uncontrollable jealousy at the rare good fortune of Mrs. Bam that they threatened a rupture, second only to that which divided Western from Eastern Christendom. At a combined committee of the ladies' department, so much venom was in circulation that the room had the livid hue of a cave of Adullum, where the figures

worked by electricity. If Barnum could have shown them for one calendar month, he would have made a Jewish fortune, and depopulated the American continent, for there would have been no more marriage.

Mrs. Bam was not there. She did not fully know that English married life is a fiery furnace, and that the steady yearning for a death is the one sincere daily prayer in the majority of English homes. So she ventured to stay away and interview a mourning manufacturer who had invented exquisite designs in widows' weeds, such as would fold up sorrow into a fascination.

The president on this occasion was Granny Grunts, a lady of many years, whose piety was odorous, and whose wrinkles were a deep proof of the miraculous. She soothed this turbulent assembly by proposing that she should head a deputation to Earl Gooseberry, and ask him to call a meeting in Exeter Hall, in order to show to the ignorant public that the Devil was not dead, but vitally divided, and on that account the more vigorous. This proposal stopped the clamour, and by opening their curiosity shut their mouths, and it seemed likely that the Granny would interview the Goose. But as they could not all go in deputation the eagerness for this distinction stopped further proceedings, and Granny closed the meeting, saying that she must refer the whole matter to Mrs. Bam.

Mrs. Bam was annoyed at the fracas, but she had learnt something. She prided herself that she could outwit and govern this perverse race which neither man nor law can tame. So she began to deploy her forces with the pleasing sensations of a general, when he orders ten thousand of his fellow-men to go and be shot.

She first constituted a large committee of married women only. In some respects she preferred married women. They reminded her so often of her late hubby that there was always a sort of long-standing intimacy between them and herself; and besides, for business purposes, they possessed an undaunted effrontery, acquired by daily habit, which rendered them invaluable as propagandists.

She occasionally found girls fail her. They might be shy or diffident, or even conscientious; and once or twice she had found them sincere. This was not to be tolerated, for it blocked all business, and though she did not quite understand the patent process which turned them all into brazen scorpions when they had been married twelve months, she was clear as to the fact, and therefore it suited her well to form them into a special committee, and *they* also felt that vanity gratified, for which more than half of them had married.

Out of the general committee she formed a special guild, or inner sisterhood; for in order to associate

an element of burlesque with business, they called each other sisters, and had names of special affection. Because they were women, and thought they were literary, they wished to polish up their philanthropy with furniture paste, so their names were formed to tickle the ear by alliteration. The President was Mrs. Bam; Vice-ditto, Granny Grunts. The two organizing secretaries were Sister Scatter Smile and Sister Sweet Simper; the corresponding secretary was Sister Blow Bubble; the treasurer was Sister Gobble Good.

Mrs. Bam's policy had succeeded. Those were the disorderly spirits that led on the clamorous factions. But Mrs. Bam had given them means of exercising power, of torturing others, and, above all, a pretext for forgetting that they had homes and husbands. They no longer envied the widow her sweet freedom, but they devoted their energies to the sublime task of "saving the world," which meant front seats for themselves on every occasion, and extinction to everybody who opposed them.

Granny Grunts had been an heiress, though it required enough faith to set up twelve new apostles in order to believe this statement. She had received an immense fortune from a doating father, who had "made his pile" in the ship-building line. In that distant, unwrinkled period, she was much sought after by those fashionable pieces of articu-

lated gingerbread, who think that government exists to give them salaries for doing nothing, and who feel that a nation's first duty is to see that they have a pension. One of these distinguished persons succeeded in the mechanical operation which is called "winning the affections." The main benefit he had derived from this world was, that he had been fairly well dressed ever since he came into it. His greatest use in the expenditure of nature had been to carry about, for a short space of time, a very small quantity of flowers in a buttonhole.

He was not of a serious turn, and thought as much about a future life as an oyster. But marriage did much for him. Granny soon convinced him that there *should* be a better world, and to solve the question, he went to see.

Twelve respectable Britishers looked at his lovely corpse, and wished to bring in a verdict that he had done a noble deed; but the coroner suggested that perhaps some of them were married, and had better take care.

The young widow then began to spend her fortune herself, and tried to lay the spectre of the "loved one" by immense donations to the unknown ones. Men mistook her nightmare for piety, and her money for grace, till she reached the lofty position of Vice-President of this divine Sisterhood.

Each of the organizing secretaries had tempers

hot enough to work the machinery of a man-of-war round the world. One had the home department and the other the foreign, and as they were little gray-ish-green-ish-eyed women, with ferrety faces, they found considerable employment for their features in watching each other's operations. No defenceless witness ever received a greater dressing of sulphuric acid at the hands of a bullying barrister than the Home Secretary used to receive from the foreign, or *vice versâ.*

Sister Blow Bubble had a reputation for milliners' bills and a righteous roll of the eye. She believed in prayer and placards, but for the last ten years her groom had never joined in the general confession or heard the blessing pronounced, because at each end of the service he was engaged in taking care of the pious lady's horse. Her husband was conscious of a change of temperature, if he only allowed her fifty pounds for a ball dress, but the nursery governess who took charge of the bodies of her children and trained their "immortal souls," received twenty pounds a year, with three weeks' holiday; but the latter item was purely imaginary, as no piece of human nature in the form of a nurse or governess had yet been found that could endure one year of Blow Bubble's religion *at home.*

Sister Gobble Good was a very ordinary person, such as you, my wearied reader, meet every day, unless you have a season return-ticket for another world. She

was married, mysterious, incomprehensible, as full of lightning as if she was the mother of electric eels. Longing for all things she had not—scorching in the fires of her own hell everything she had.

To her husband she was a pillar of cloud in company and a pillar of fire when alone. He said she possessed so many devils that he wondered that he was not indicted (in a Christian country) for polygamy the morning after his marriage.

To any observer her mouth was labelled "Poison." If women knew, even in that *dim* sense in which they know anything, what secrets they write on their faces, they would either go veiled, as in the East, or they would strive daily to come at least within rumour of a noble thought once in a lifetime.

Their meetings were frequent, as the President wished to keep them employed, and they were eager to persuade this country that they had furnished flannel and salvation to every bare-backed savage that enjoyed real life. At one of the early meetings, Sister Sweet Simper had a long report on the educational department, and after many statistics on schools and scholars that would have sounded like real progress to anyone not on that committee or a member of parliament, her face grew dark and her voice took the tones of an inspired wild cat, as she said, "Many precious souls have been gathered into the fold and we are devoutly thankful. The heathen and the savage wait for our consolation, but

it is our faithless countrywomen who impede the good work. Since my tenure of office, no fewer than six of our trained schoolmistresses have married in the colonies. We have paid their passage out, we watched them with a keen vigilance, we rebuked the smallest deviation from the full routine, we threatened their speedy dismissal if they tampered with the male creatures who prowl about there, because they are too bad to remain at home; and yet after all our warnings and tears, and the prayers with which we sent them, they have faithlessly deserted us."

The whole committee glared like hyænas brought in for their first training lesson.

Sister Gobble rose tremulous with feelings that seemed too deep to be earthly, and asked, "Could you not impose further conditions; could you not remind them that they are the slaves of the committee, could you not reduce their salaries to such a point that they should no longer dress in a way to attract the tyrannical and rapacious sex? If a governess of mine were to become engaged I should dismiss her without notice, and surely these creatures for whom we take such pains are not to insult the majesty of this committee by indulging the vagaries of lower animals."

The committee gave their hysterical approval of these charitable sentiments.

"The minxes! Marry indeed!" said Sister Scatter

Smile. "Bring them back and give them schools in the East End."

Granny Grunts seemed terrified at the awful disclosures, and was playing hide-and-seek in her own wrinkles.

Hysteria held its carnival, but masks were not worn.

When the sheeted scorn had flared itself out, and a seared silence became somewhat perceptible, Sister Blow Bubble rose with that peculiar livid hue on her face that makes one think of Battle's Vermin Killer (only the *vermin* are not killed), and said, "Dear Sisters, in our darkness a merciful light arises. Only to-day I had news from Africa; that dark continent looks to us for light. I wept as I thought of those precious black souls, and the price with which they are bought. I thought of the light and comfort of my own nursery, and there were dear little black children in their nude deformity sinking into brute beasts. The thought may well sadden a mother's heart, and to-day I have been sad amidst our levity and our wrangling."

Here she sobbed effectively. She paused. A dark exhalation seemed to rise from the room. The question under discussion might have been sewage.

Mrs. Bam struggled to conceal her smiles. Her gratification was intense. No successful advertiser of soap or patent medicine ever had a prouder moment. She *knew* the Bubble, and had passed some days under her roof. The Bubble was one of

those refined dames who never see inside their own kitchen or nursery. If she was not busy, she had her children up once a day and interviewed them, pretty much as she interviewed the cook, only not quite so long. Her nurse and the nursery governess were the constant companions of the young exiles.

As the nurse and governess could never very long endure the temperature that Blow Bubble so often raised, the children got a good deal of variety, and of a kind not always the most carefully selected. These children were, therefore, initiated into the mysteries of lewdness, which form the recreation of a certain order of female life. The eldest had scarcely entered into its teens but it knew enough ribald stories and lewd rhymes to have amused a company of medical students.

Mrs. Bam knew all this, and knew also that it was more common than not in most of the well-to-do families of this country. And to witness the emotion of Bubble over the native nudity of the natural black, whilst she had not a thought for the fetid obscenities of her own house and her own offspring, was a fount of merriment and an assurance of final triumph over the Teutonic race. She almost loved her for the tears she had caused these flinty rocks to shed, and but for fear of evil passions she would have clasped her there and then in her arms. But as it was, she could only gaze on her faithful band, whilst they applied their handkerchiefs with a singular

uniformity, as if they were taking lessons in the art of dusting.

At length sounds were audible, and confused utterances of—

"Dear black children!"

"Bibles!"

"Flannels!"

"Prayer Books!"

"Paper-linen!"

"Tracts!"

"Small-toothed combs!"

"Hair-wash!"

Then Granny rose, and promised a large donation with an unctuous blessing upon her distant and unknown relatives whom she would "never meet this side the river."

Funds were voted, and even Gobble did not raise a single objection. They were united in their black design.

The meeting broke up in a state of religious enthusiasm, and wilfully ignorant that the seeds of national immorality were being sown broadcast in their own homes, they departed, feeling that the negro was one step nearer heaven, and they themselves already had tasted its aroma in their own philanthropic tears.

Mrs. Bam asked the officials to tea-and-turn-out, and smiled upon them with the benign satisfaction of a prosperous crossing-sweeper.

CHAPTER XXV.

PERHAPS it matters little whether a man has a correct explanation of life or its mysteries, but the men who have left the most lasting mark on the history of their race are those who have accepted or devised some explanation that could sustain the life with hope.

During the weeks of this inquiry, the Count had grown perceptibly more amiable. He had seen more of the old Doctor's family and the Misses Filledful had illuminated their hopes in the light of his smile. The same day that he had finished his search to his own satisfaction, he was walking in one of the avenues that are the pride of Wooden Spoon, in a mood of serene exhaltation, when these young ladies met him. They gave him the unmeaning salutation with which we all tell our neighbours that we wish them good and only good; and when his bright eyes turned to them, they almost felt they would like to blush at the manifest interest he showed, only they had always been told they ought not. Like a young man who fancies he has found a new patent panacea for the world, which turns out to be a cast-off shoe of his great grandfather, the

Count longed to inquire of others what they felt of life and how they solved its problems.

It was the last day of the May races, and was one of those fine sparkling afternoons which lure a few hundred persons to the banks of the Isis to witness the favourite exhibition of muscle and emulation, when old and young forget the burden and struggle of existence in their excitement to see one boat bump another. The Count was not aquatic, and the river had not received that amount of his attention which it deserved. And lately, so buried had he been in his inquiry, that the eights had nearly passed away without his knowing they had been.

To-day they asked him to go witness the race. The Wooden Spoon boat had gone up some places and an exciting race was expected. He joined them, and soon they were in a motley throng, animated with that vulgar principle which old philosophers used to fancy was the first requisite of life, viz., self-preservation. As they sat on the stately barge and the crowd grew vaster, and the destiny of the world seemed to hang on the cut of a gown or the shade of a ribbon, he said to Miss Aramantha, "I never see such a crowd without feeling that I almost taste the brine of Xerxes' tears."

Aramantha raised her blue eyes with suppressed wonder and asked, "Why did he weep? He was a Greek king, wasn't he?"

"I suppose he wept because he felt that decay

was written on the proudest achievement of his life and of his race."

"He must have been a morbid egotist," she said.

"Do you think, then," he asked, astonished, "that egotism is the main source of our weeping? Have *you* felt that self-sacrifice would uproot our misery?"

"Not at all," she replied, "I only know that I weep when I am helpless and vexed, and I suppose one would weep if one never got what we wanted; but this man, you say, had done wonders, and wept because he had. Was he the man who wept because there was nothing to do, and nobody to kill?"

"No, he was not Alexander. But do you not think that selfishness is the plague-spot of civilization?"

"I do not know anything about it—do you mean schoolboards and all that? Because papa says some day there will be no religion if this kind of thing becomes common. Won't it be horrible then?"

"Perhaps. But I think you mistook my point. No religion at all would surely not be worse than a religion which makes no difference in our daily conduct."

"O, but it would be far worse! Fancy how awful it must be to live heathen. And then you must admire our services. But the Germans do not care for services and cathedrals, do they? It is very odd, so fond as they are of music. There goes the minute-gun, they will be off directly."

And so they were. The crowd surged on either bank to catch a glimpse of the approaching boats, and undergrads in every stage of nudity rushed with frantic yells along the bank. Then all was over. The crowd dispersed, and the poor patient river subsided in relief.

The Count left his fair egotist, not quite so radiant as when he joined her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THAT evening the dinner-tables in the hall of Wooden Spoon were particularly uproarious. Their boat had done well, and if every member of the college had been an even mixture of Neptune and of Hercules, the reception of the crew could not have been more tumultuous.

The Count was perhaps the saddest person there. He was never quite in harmony with the peculiar gaseous compounds that are produced by animal and vegetable spirits on these occasions, but to-night he was specially untuned. His first attempt to introduce his new faith into the outer world had resulted very much as the old exposure of infants used to. The first faint suspicion had arisen that he was more than ever out of harmony with foreigners amongst whom he lived. By adopting their religion, he seemed to have lessened his chance of real friendship with them.

He had stood in the twilight of that May evening and *felt* the darkness that settled on the college quadrangle. He had not called upon his tutor lately, so he determined to pay him a visit.

The Reverend Steady Swig was not much unlike the unknown army of Oxford tutors. He knew life

as the recluse and the tourist know it. For twenty-four weeks every year he discharged the duties of a well-oiled machine, smoothly and satisfactorily. For nearly twenty years had he been tutor of his college without fear of dismissal—without hope of preferment. The world to him was fixed. His very dreams were like opaque remnants of the glacial period. During most of these years he had been a deacon in the National Church. He had no intention of being other than a deacon. Changes in the ministry and vacancies in high ecclesiastical ranks did not mar his peace. He read from habit and he criticized from instinct. He was rather negative than positive. No one had ever accused him of heterodoxy, no party would have given him a medal as the champion of truth. His life had much of the circular loveliness of a well-made O.

The Count found him in his room surrounded with all that cultured refinement could desire. Magazines and photographs and a few choice flowers covered his table. It was not sultry, so a bright fire was burning, whilst a banner-screen did its brilliant best to keep all the heat out of the room.

Mr. Steady Swig received him with a mechanical affability, and, after the usual courtesies, they gathered round the fire with that instinct which is immensely older than colleges or books, and the tutor remarked—

"Our boat has done well. Was not that a splendid bump last night?"

"I was not there last night," replied the Count.

"I suppose you do not take that interest in boating that we do. The Germans are not so enthusiastic in outdoor recreations, are they?"

"I think not. You see they are more mechanical. They read by the mile. They take their recreation by the square foot. Their drinking is gauged by the elasticity of one human organ, and in smoking and philosophy they represent the shady side of the Infinite."

"You invert the old proverb about the prophet and his country. You seem to depreciate the work and position of the German. We at Oxford think that all German productions are the best in their line, so much so, that we have given over doing original work in order to translate what they have invented. A large proportion of our best lectures are simply German annotations reduced to the vulgar tongue. Probably we over-estimate them, and it is pleasing to find a German who can admit that they are not absolute perfection. I had a Scotchman and a German here one night, and I thought they would actually have fought, they were so vehement in asserting the intellectual supremacy of their native countries."

"Doubtless. But what a burlesque that, in an intellectual survey, a man should be conscious of

the few square yards of soil he calls his native land!"

"We call it patriotism, but when found in England only, I think you style it 'insular prejudice.' However, I tried to calm the two combatants by showing them that they belonged to the same stock, that they were Teutons, and then they drank to the success of Teutonic civilization, which they maintained was destined to fill the world. Do you think there is any truth in this?"

"I must confess I have scarcely thought of it. But it is fashionable—it is grotesque—it is highly flattering to those who propound the theory, which three elements ought to command universal belief. It is singular that the leading feature in almost every system is that it is full of flattery to the inventor of the system. In a general sense men have started with the theory that man was the pillar and crown of the universe, and then logically concluded that the stars were hung up solely to give him light. Half the admitted superiority of man to woman arises from the fact that man was the stronger brute, the other half is due to the accident that man constructed the systems which embody that lofty sentiment. So with individuals. You never found a man with a little nose preaching that great noses were in some mysterious manner allied to conquest.

So with this Teutonic civilization, it is a grand

thing for Teutons to believe in and rave about. Yet one would imagine that the perished civilizations had left behind rags enough to cover our pride as with sackcloth. Pardon me, but I fear I perceptibly approach the savage when I think or speak of civilization: it first drives me to frenzy, and then drowns me in despair, for all civilization seems but an even mixture of the chrysalis and the fossil. It is either going to be or was, but never *is*. There is only one thing in the history of the human race that is more wretchedly miserable than its civilization!"

"You will make an Oxford pessimist in good time, Count, if you progress like this. Pray what is that one thing?"

"It is its religion. In fact, I came in to-night to talk with you about the subject of religion if you have a few minutes to spare."

The Reverend Steady Swig nearly lost his balance. If any unoffending citizen had ventured to remind the Proctor that the common law of England was superior to the antiquated rights of his office, that velveteen potentate could not have been more astonished than poor Swig. For twenty years he had kept chapels, taken services, and sometimes preached, but never had living mortal named to him the subject of religion. His own life was stainless. His religion had all the loveliness of mechanism. It required a slight corrective, and this was done by means of a cheque at the end of each term. And it

seemed to him that to be respectable and religious was the natural condition of all beings who did not mar their lives by effort. He re-adjusted the banner-screen. He had the presence of mind to find the decanter and pour out two glasses of wine, whilst he jerked out these phrases not absolutely connected: "I shall be happy—I fear I don't know—I am not busy in an evening—take some wine."

The Count bowed his acknowledgments, and said, "I fear I am morbidly melancholy or worse, for I am almost driven to despair by the failure of all empires and civilizations, and in seeking the cause I am led to the conclusion that selfishness is really the disease of which all human greatness dies, and then to my astonishment I found that there was a religion of unselfishness, which, I believe, you call the National Church in this country.

You may well wonder, but I had never carefully read the life of the Founder of Christianity till lately, and it left an inconceivable impression on my mind, and I wish to find out from you, as a clergyman, whether I understand it rightly."

"You astound me. I had no idea that rationalism or agnosticism had spread so fatally in Germany, that any one in your position could have been brought up without being familiar with all the leading facts and principles of Christianity. It is singular!"

Of course the Count could not explain, and he

was compelled to let rationalism bear all the responsibility at present, and he asked: "Is it then acknowledged that giving to others is the first law of spiritual life, just as it is the first law of material life?"

"I don't quite understand you. I have not read much science, and I do not know the laws of physical life very fully. But we were always taught that the first law of nature was self-preservation."

"Far from it, the first law of nature—if one may use the paradox of first in such a case—seems to be preservation of others. Everything is dependent, and what we commonly style the most *useful* things are those who simply live for others, and still more forcibly is this apparent in the case of things we style *beautiful*."

"I am not sure that I grasp your position, but what has all this to do with religion? Religion is a revelation, or as we usually say, a creed, with some form of worship to assist it."

"But I thought religion now was understood to be a practical moral force acting on the lives of men."

"Some people have held that view, but its failure is its own refutation. These moral activities have ended in the spasms that gave them birth. Whether you take England or the continent, you will find the most permanently fixed religions are those which meddle least with individual conduct. Our country,

for instance, is eaten up with sects, and you will learn that each of them began by being a moral panacea and ended in a well stuffed respectability."

"Is the world then to go on continually gulled in this way, by limited liability companies, formed to supply pious veneering for their neighbours? You can hardly call this progress."

"No; but then progress is unknown except in delirious dreaming. The world is round, you know, and so is everything connected with man, and when he has gone the round there is nothing left but to begin the same thing over again. It is the limitation imposed by form and there is nothing new in history, if you take plenty of it and make your circle wide enough."

"Then, I suppose, there have been several persons, in the cycles of time, like the Founder of Christianity, and we must expect another, when that part of the circle comes round again, must we?"

The tutor looked inquiringly at the door, then the window, as if to ask whether all was safe, then replied softly, "Well, ah—perhaps; ah—it would be bold to assert it definitely. That *is* supposed to lie a little outside ordinary human experience."

"Very good. Would it not then introduce some new element or force into human experience?"

"That would seem a logical conclusion, yet I very much doubt whether our civilization is superior to that of the Egyptians or the Greeks."

"Pardon me, the question is whether Christ differed from every Egyptian or Greek, and if so, in what respect?"

"I have virtually admitted that He did, and probably in more than one particular."

"Yes, but what one principle is the most unlike mankind—the most potent to change the world's life and give it beauty instead of decay? Did He reveal such a principle? And was it not this that He gave everything and received nothing, whilst man clamours for everything and gives not?"

"You refer to self-denial, do you?

Yes, I think that is taught prominently, but that is very old, you know; it is, in fact, the essence of every civilization."

"You mean as a matter of policy and profit. I wished to convey more than this. Self-denial is a form of death that enriches life, but self-giving is life, and this seems to me to mark the life of Christ as unique in human history."

At this instant a shower of shivered glass fell into the room, and an uproarious yell stopped the dialogue.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. STEADY SWIG realized the position of affairs and dropped his Christian name with the ejaculation of "Brutes." Then pointing to the door, he said, "It will be all right for you to go out. Good night," and he disappeared into a back room.

Whilst they had been discussing old civilizations and new religions, a wine party to the crew had been making rapid progress in the direction of riot, and but for the thick walls of a projecting angle they would have been aware of it at a much earlier stage.

The noble Lord Peppercorn had long since been removed from Wooden Spoon and found refuge in Extinguisher Hall, but to-night he was present and led the revel with truly princely pluck, regardless of expense or law. They had levied black mail upon all rooms which they could enter, in the shape of caps and gowns and chairs, &c. They forced the door of one unlucky man who was too poor to join in the more lavish expenses and had earned the name of "Pious Smug," because he had never yet been in a row. The only respectable piece of furniture he had was an arm-chair, and this they took to crown the height of the pile of chairs, &c.,

in the quadrangle. Having first placed the effigy of the late senior Proctor in it, because he had rendered himself peculiarly unpopular in "drawing" billiard-rooms, they raised the chair and called it Dido's pyre, and then applied a light to it on all sides. The furniture crackled in the flames and they stood around yelling till more mischief should arise.

Scout there was none. The hired waiters had also disappeared, for they had emptied champagne cup on their heads and shied pine-apple at them, till they departed disgusted and drenched.

When the flame blazed its highest one might have discerned the face of Dr. Filledful, at an upper window, with the scorn of generations settling down into eternity on every feature.

Those who knew him best, did not wonder that scorn and contempt threw a shade over his tenderest smile. He was a man of true culture and high aspirations, yet his life seemed to range between the milliners' bills of the feminine Filledfuls and the bon-fires of schoolboys, who, ten years hence, would rather not ask him to lunch. Though he was a potentate amongst men and had a fame bounded by no one continent, yet he durst not have walked round that bon-fire once for fear of compromising his dignity and perhaps receiving insult. He left the hideous spectacle, and, in his favourite phrase, "thanked God that there was a hell, where the scum of the earth would some day be taken care of."

When the Dido's pyre had fallen in and the Proctor's effigy had ascended in tongues of flame, Peppercorn organized his "trained bands," whose duty it was to march round the quad., the foremost carrying the crew shoulder high, and the rest introducing the spectre to the festival by singing, "John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave," &c., armed with empty bottles, one at least of which was to go through every front window. This procession it was, that had driven Steady Swig into his retreat. Now Swig was not particularly unpopular in his college, because he was not particularly anything. But it was supposed that he slightly objected to this treatment, because there was a tradition that on one occasion he had looked out of the window and requested their absence, much to the boys' amusement, and one of them tenderly inquired if his mother knew that he was out, whilst another endeavoured to seduce him to form an attachment with a hooked stick.

After that he always retired to his room, which did *not* face the quadrangle, at the first signal from the "brutes."

The Count allowed them to file past on this occasion, before stepping out into the quadrangle. This procession seemed to him the most striking performance he had seen, by way of a burlesque, on the mortality of the body and the immorality of the soul.

Presently they halted, the bottles were all used and this form of delight exhausted, and so again they gathered in a group and listened for orders, then dispersed with loud cheering.

The Count strolled leisurely across the quad. and met Peppercorn, who, as soon as he saw him, said—

"What, you here? you old devil, you; why do you always go out when I call upon you?"

This truly English salutation jarred considerably, but the Count said readily—

"Tu quoque. Why do you always call when I am out?"

"Well it did not matter to-night, we helped ourselves, but we have not looted you much, we only burnt a few of those beggarly books of yours. I thought it would please the Doctor to know that for once the library had been of some use, and that at least a few of his volumes had enlightened some of the darkest members of his college. By jove they have got him! Now for some fun, come along."

The Count found himself dragged at once towards the smouldering fire, where a ruffian group had secured the "Pious Smug," they held a council of war to devise what would most torture the captive and most amuse themselves. When many suggestions and hiccups had been lavished on this noble object, they determined that he should drink off a bottle of champagne, whilst the rest sang "drink, puppy, drink," because he was a "teetotaler."

He, poor wretch, could not have appeared more terrified in the hands of naked savages.

Bottles were produced, and the first was poured down his throat—outside. The second was applied in the same manner, but posteriorly. Whilst the struggle was going on many of his enemies were partaking, which rendered some incapable and others violent.

The Count had witnessed a good deal of rough play and really feared that serious injury would be inflicted, so he turned to Peppercorn and said, "This has gone far enough now, tell them to let him go," and without waiting for orders, he pushed into the group, and as he was sober and they were not, he set the wretch free, who, without being told, ran.

Then the riot became promiscuous, and at length excess murdered itself, and a lofty tranquillity settled on the ignoble scene.

A porter or two appeared. Those who did not belong to the college were carried to their cabs; those who did, were carried to their rooms.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COUNT found that three valuable books had been reduced to ashes. At any other time this would have been irritating, but after this romp of British navvyism, which he had witnessed, a book more or less, seemed so much useless chaff in a world of scum.

He sat in the divine silence and contemplated the quiet life of the stars, till the fever abated and a peace laden with slumber settled upon him.

* * * *

The same morning he called upon the Doctor, for the books were from the college library and the Count wished to restore them, as far as he could.

The Doctor was crimson with shame or anger, and his flabby features curled with scorn, like a lettuce leaf.

He had closely cross-examined the porter to find out what part the Count had taken in the revel, and only by Swig's accidental evidence, had the Doctor been fully convinced that the Count had had neither hand nor foot in the matter.

When the Count named the books, one of which was a rare edition of Spinoza, the Doctor was evidently moved and said with vehemence—

"Sir, you cannot replace it. It was the only copy in Oxford. Can you oblige me with the names of the Vandals who fetched those books from your room, and within one hour they shall be expelled from the college."

"I need hardly say," replied the Count, "that I was not there. If I had been it would not have happened."

"Well, for the future, rare books must not be taken out of the library. It is sufficient humiliation and torture to have to live with brute beasts who cannot understand a book, but I will empty the college rather than see the library burnt piecemeal."

Then the learned reverend paused, for amongst the offenders were more than one person of title, and he had connived at certain irregularities, for on more than one occasion had Mrs. Doctor smuggled some of them into college after midnight, when they return together from a ball in the Doctor's carriage. At that particular moment he was not quite sure whether he was most enraged with human nature in the form of wives or in the form of nobles, and above all an intellectual young Count who read out-of-the-way books, seemed to mar the face of civilization. He felt, too, that he was rather making an exhibition of himself in a way not peculiarly dignified, so changing his countenance with the rapidity of a married woman at the sound of her husband's footstep, he inquired—

"Do you wish for a new philosophy or a new religion, that you select this strange branch of literature?"

"I am not aware that I seek anything new, as I never had either."

"But you had a religion!" snapped the Doctor, with a look of reproach, seasoned with a slice of the Spanish inquisition.

"No," replied the Count, "I was brought up without any religion whatever, so as to be perfectly unbiassed. And I am singularly struck with the beauty of your religion—I mean with the life of the Founder."

The Doctor did not quite grasp this, and thought it was patronizing, so he replied a little tartly—

"It is certainly good of you to pay it that compliment. Pray what is it that struck you so much?"

"That it teaches us what life is and how all men may obtain it. It seems to me the only religion, in fact the only system whatever, that promises to give to society life, at once permanent and progressive.

All previous forms of civilization have been but temporary struggles against decay. One single principle of this religion would renew the youth of the world."

"And pray what principle is that?" asked the Doctor in a state of amusement which threatened his gravity.

"That life consists in giving, not receiving."

"Alms-giving, do you mean?"

"Not quite that. Though that would form a microscopic part of the whole. In self-giving."

"I think you are losing yourself in a maze of transcendentalism. Unless this alters, some day the whole German nation will become a cloud. What, pray, does 'self-giving' mean, when translated into actual life?"

"It means living for others, not an agony imposed upon ourselves under the delusion that we can *possess* anything—much less everything."

"Pardon me, I can scarcely restrain a smile. May I ask if you have deluded yourself into thinking that all the world is deluded except yourself? Remember, it is a fatal thing to be different from your race, and often dangerous even to pretend to be different. The first law of life I would press upon every young man is, live like the rest of your species in your own social rank. You look astonished, but would it not have robbed the gibbet and the fire of their noblest victims?"

"Doubtless. And may I suggest it would have robbed the world of its highest culture and its noblest life. But admitting your position, I am not pretending to be different from others. I merely say that Christianity does seem to me different from all other religions by teaching men unreserved and total self-sacrifice, and that the life of Christ exerts its influence on the world because it was the only perfect

life—because it gave everything and received nothing."

"But I need hardly remind you that the life of Christ was not human life."

"True, but I thought He came to introduce life into a decaying world and that it was agreed, in some sense or other, He promised it immortality. Human history can be understood to some extent, if we see that each individual life forms a part of that undecaying loveliness which is to fill the world. But I find no key to the daily struggle either in chance or destiny, if every generation is only a new form of folly, and nations rise to splendour only to build monuments to cover their putrefaction."

"It is no use—it is no use. You are struggling against eternal laws. Ebb and flow, which is the law of the tides, is the law of all things on earth, both men and nations and religions. You are simply possessed by this transcendental idea of yours. If this is what men become, I am glad I never read German philosophy. We English are a practical people. Why, one day spent on your new principle would ruin all commerce and beggar both Church and State."

"Then may I ask one practical question, to apply this principle, which you are pleased to call mine, Who are the persons that support the State and the Church? Is it not the very men, who (often unconsciously) make the nearest approach to this true law of life?

Do the countless hordes, who barely exist, make the wealth of the State, or the few hundreds who live in pomp and grind their brothers into dust beneath their golden chariots? Does the hard-working curate, who starves and dies merely to scatter a few seeds of the gospel amongst brutes, who have just enough intelligence to misunderstand and malign, render a National Church even possible, or is it the Right Rev. noble Lord who imitates the Nazarene, at the distance of ten thousand a year?"

A faint flush passed over the features of the Doctor. He had received a D.D. in the first University in the world as a reward and patent of success. His religious views were known to no man, and all women supposed him orthodox. In politics he consistently voted Conservative, but he was never embroiled in faction. He annually filled up forms for a large number of unknown dummies, who bowed and faltered in answer to his questions, and said they "were going into the Church," as if they were not there already. He had a vague idea that these beings were useful as flunkeys to their ecclesiastical superiors, but that any one should tell him that they were in any sense necessary to the Church, was a statement he no more believed than that Aramantha's poodle was necessary for a political dinner. He had always felt that the Church consisted of the brilliant men he knew, who supported on piety and policy had secured *most* that was worth having in this world and a prospect

of *everything* in the next. That he should be told by a boy that these men were only upholsterers in the sanctuary of holiness, was a trying moment, and required a man to be embalmed in grace and pulverized fossils to let it pass unnoticed.

The Count fixed a steady gaze on the Doctor and waited. The faint flush faded, and the Doctor said, in the tone of a new patent refrigerator, "You would scarcely expect my assent to such a statement. I see you are in theory a philosopher, in practice a Nihilist. Some day you will think otherwise—far otherwise. Good morning."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COUNT left Doctor Filledful somewhat perturbed and disappointed. He wondered which of them was so blinded that he could not understand the other. He felt that possibly his view of life, his admiration of Christianity, his hope for the future of the human race, were all of them absolutely groundless. It would be disappointing to learn that they were. Yet he was seeking truth with a relentless earnestness that neither gave nor asked quarter, and he would have sacrificed his pet ideas as readily as a member of parliament sacrifices his borough, when once said borough stands in the way of his private interests. But the Doctor had never comprehended this position—never seen there was such a position to comprehend. Yet the Doctor was a man of learning and penetration, but he had entombed himself in the impenetrable grave of prosperity, and when a man goes well through life, he feels that life is a very pleasant thing, and that every body goes well through it who wishes to, or at least who deserves to. The Count felt that hideous weight which had crushed his early London life—the weight of despair at the blind folly of the all-devouring monster that men call success.

He began to realize that life's mystery cannot be read in radiant light, but by eyes that are washed with tears.

When a man succeeds he usually becomes a vampire or a machine, and not unfrequently combines the instincts of the one with the regular precision of the other.

It is the broken heart that guides other sufferers to the balm of healing. In this world, God Himself was perfected through suffering, and in no age has life's richest music fallen from harp-strings of gold.

His day had been clouded and he hid away in solitude. He mused much, and probably his thoughts and feelings were incorrect, for the particle of truth that each being can grasp is the smallest conceivable mite in a world of atoms and smoke.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE term was drawing to its close, and there were the usual indications that a season of festivity was approaching, amongst others a very large and fashionable party in the drawing-room of Mrs. Filledful. The Count arrived a little late and a little languid. He knew the kind of evening that was before him. Drawing-rooms in England had no charm for him. The very name reminded him of a blister, and the bare-necked dames seemed like so many hospital nurses on strike, ready to spread blisters for all future generations of men. He knew them as they are. To him they were the shambles of human nature, where the human animal was bought and sold, especially if she was a little tainted. To any one who has not fully realized that life is a bagatelle board, three or four hours of that simpering cackle, which only lacks reality to express the intelligence of an ordinary barn-door fowl, does require an apology of some sort.

These were the sentiments that were uppermost in the Count's mind as he walked across the quadrangle from his rooms.

His arrival was made known in the usual form, and he brought his nose a little nearer the earth in the

usual form, as he saluted the radiant Mrs. Filledful. Music was just commencing, and it gave them time to retire and observe the groups assembled.

The music proceeded—the conversation advanced. The music became impassioned—the conversation was frantic. The two together demonstrated the possibility of the tower of Babel remaining unfinished. Singular but late confirmation of the truth of the Bible—human nature being always the same, &c. (See any hand-book on moral walnuts or social nutmegs.)

The Doctor was there, looking like a sample cheese, for he was much bored. He was tethered to an illustrious foreigner, who was on a tour to comprehend "the English idiosyncrasy," so he said; but why he should choose to add crazy to idiots, when either word expresses the national characteristic sufficiently well, I must ask the reader to inform me. But there they were with the other idiots, and when the music raged and the conversation stormed, verily idiot-crazy was no adequate expression of the novel and shattering complications that disturbed the distinguished liver of the illustrious foreigner.

The foreigner made a note, supposed to throw some light on a passage of Julius Cæsar referring to the painted savages of this island.

There was a hang-dog look in the Doctor's face which said plainly "cut the string and I will run," for he had a naughty trick of running from these drawing-

room parties. Perhaps he had a lingering-afternoon-shadow-sort of respect for the feminine Filledfuls, and in order to preserve it, wished to escape them when they were at their worst.

But Mrs. Filledful had a theory, in common with most ladies, that men are fish and the first thing is to hook them, then play them, as one who has reduced agony to a fine art plays a salmon.

She loved to see hubby bored, for it made him more human and almost brought him down to her own reach, which was never possible when he sat on the frozen heights of pure mathematics.

Near Mrs. Filledful sat Mr. John Drawley, a tutor of Allbones College, who was a type of bachelor not unknown in every Oxford drawing-room. He had gone to chapel till he had worn his religion out, though nobody could remember having see him there. (It is wonderful how religion does wear out at Oxford. I have shown this to be the natural result of using it twice a day, all weathers, in an assize sermon on "the expense of the religious emotions." No one ever read it, so I make this reference to it in order to induce some green young persons to relieve the publishers of a few copies.) John's religious suit was known to be thin, but there were many others like him and so it did not matter. For thin garments or no garments at all do equally well, so long as there is uniformity on the subject.

John got the reputation of being a wit because he

had the credit of first saying, "I was both christened and vaccinated, but neither of them took." He had inherited a small but respectable patrimony, and held a rich fellowship in his college. For a quarter of a century marriageable girls had inquired who he was, and then had taken a keen interest in the history of his college or himself, in his physical powers, or his mental achievements, in short, in anything that began with a D, or was remotely connected with it, and as all the other letters of the alphabet are remotely connected with it, John had never yet found a subject which he touched upon in those golden days that was not interesting to some woman between fifteen and fifty-five. But the golden days had gone, and women no longer tried to hook him, for it was agreed that John had a pachydermous heart, which no blandishments could melt. He was scarcely the image of Apollo, for his features had a certain linear definitiveness, which almost made one think that some one had been practising "riders" on the fourth book of Euclid, when they were put together, for triangles had been inscribed in circles, and circles had been described round triangles in that marvellous fashion which the rustic calls hollows and crow's feet. His whiskers and beard reminded one of the sandy desert, and it seemed as if a few seeds had been scattered broadcast on the scanty soil of the lower part of the face, and then that some "'prentice hand" had

thinned them out with a small hoe, to encourage the remaining patches to reach maturity. His nose ended sharply, *i.e.*, it looked as if some one had put a point on, with a view to using it for a peg. Add to these interesting details a faded sort of gray eye, surmounted by a brow of average dimensions, you will then recognize the slim figure of John, as he lounged through life to the grave, preaching to his friends that this world was a "gigantic blunder."

But this noble sentiment was never paraded before ladies, for John thought it was philosophy, and as he had not much of that condiment, he felt it was far too precious to be wasted on women.

The Misses F.f. and their friends were scattered about with artistic profusion, intended for effect, to relieve the monotony of so many male creatures. For in Oxford the male creature is always too abundant—male creatures surround every table—male creatures hide the piano—male creatures prop up all the walls until the motionless insipidity of so much shirt-front gives the room the appearance of a laundress establishment in the drying stage. But on this occasion the creature had been repressed a little, and the Misses F.f. had imported a large re-inforcement of female anatomy, to tone up the shroud-like appearance of shirt-front aforesaid. The anatomy on these occasions is prodigious and makes one realize what a profligate old dame nature is. Many a vertebra and clavicle seems to attain a

prominence altogether unsuspected, and to struggle with the cuticular fetter, as saying, let me out, that I cry, "Who'll buy? Who'll buy?"

Miss Aramantha had arranged the luxurious tassels of her eye-lashes into fish-hooks, and the speaking orbs said, "I am prepared for an angling match against the world."

But the music has long since stopped, the applause has been given, and the performer is doing his best to feign that he believes they mean it. Whilst a suit of clothes that has been telling of an exciting cricket match at the top of his voice, and thus done his best to murder the music, now turns foully on the English language, and asks, "*Who* is it by?"

And now the Count must say something, for Aramantha is bearing down upon him, she offers the fractional part of two fingers with a graceful and easy motion of the arm, like the voluntary projection of an ordinary pump-handle, and says she hopes he is well, as if she had learnt her language from Jack Frost.

The Count always treats ladies with the profound respect of a man who does not know them, and somehow Miss Aramantha always forgets the letters of Jack Frost's alphabet, and thaws into one degree and a half of naturalness under his or some other influence. And so now with the pleasant gaiety of a familiar friend, she says—

"What a long time it is since I saw you, Count;

have you been playing at hide-and-seek with the world? Why, the last time that I saw you was at the boats, and you said that you always tasted the brine of the ocean when you were near a river, did you not?"

"I was not aware that I ever said anything half so original and so facetious," he replied.

"Yes, and you added that you thought Alexander might have conquered the world, if he had only established school-boards. Now don't deny that, you ought to feel highly complimented at the interest I took in your conversation."

"I feel the compliment keenly, I assure you. I must have said many novel things that night."

"You did. But won't you forget yourself and your dear Vaterland for five minutes and come to our pic-nic to Nuneham next week, only please do not talk about Alexander, for we shall have Lord Ringfinger there, and as he is the lineal descendant of all the kings of the earth, he might not like it, you see."

"I am sorry I shall not have the rare experience of the brine of the ocean on the river, for I shall not be here. I must go down early this term."

Aramantha's face became twilight with a faint surprise, and she punished her fan, as if it were to blame for cooling the breast of this unperturbed German stoic.

Again the music commenced. The performer was

a young girl, who was conspicuous amongst the rest for the care with which she had concealed her anatomy, and for a quiet dignity of mien and shrinking modesty. She played the Count's favourite, "Moonlight Sonata," with rare execution that was full of more than mechanical precision.

The Count had insensibly approached nearer the instrument, and this had brought him close to Mrs. F.f. There he stood, whilst fierce flames burnt in his heart. It was like a rush of limitless passion.

When the music ended and the applause ceased, Mrs. F.f. turned to the Count, with a note of interrogation on every feature, to which he replied—

"That is exquisite. How singular that you English do not care for the great masters!"

"But we care for them very much," said the double F., with an accent that smacked of cucumber peel.

"Then why don't they listen to it?" he asked, glancing across the room.

"O, is that all!" she said, feeling relieved, for she had misunderstood the criticism, "that is merely one of our habits. We like music none the less. You observe how eagerly they applaud."

"True, I beg their pardon, I have been mistaken. I always thought the applause was a supercilious piece of egotism, and that they were expressing their satisfaction at their own powers of conversation under difficulties."

The double F. would have looked double daggers, but she thought of son-in-law and smiled double deceit, and the Count asked—

"Who is the lady who plays so marvellously?"

"Her name is Poppit, she is my daughter's governess."

"Who is she?"

"I said my daughter's governess."

"That expresses her relationship to you, madam; but when she is not here, who is she?"

"O, I believe the daughter of some London Curate, I am not sure. She was highly recommended to me, and she appears to understand her duties very well."

"Will you introduce me to her?"

"My dear Count, I would do anything to oblige you, but we do not do this kind of thing in England. It would simply puff her up with pride, and do her no end of harm. She would never have been here to-night, but one of my musicians failed me at the last moment.

The Count bowed his assent to the mystery of English respectability, and before he had time to exchange another word, he was "introduced" to an athletic young lady, whose arms were so muscular that they seemed like small beds of shell fish. This young lady he led away to the first vacant chair he could find, and sat down to brood over the music and the musician, whilst she sat down and wondered

how many generations would pass away before the Germans learnt the art of conversation. She tried to go through the first German declension, to be ready if he should break forth in his native language.

When he moved away, two or three dowagers and one or two men asked the double F., almost in chorus, who that striking and noble-looking young man was.

This excellent lady answered that he was a German Count, the Count of what or where she was not very certain. He was an only son. He was immensely rich. He was the first favourite at the Court at Berlin. He was wonderfully clever, but slightly solemn, slightly priggish, knew all German philosophy by heart, but was a Nihilist, as the Doctor had found out lately. She pitied the young man because he had been brought up without any religion.

"No religion!" sighed one.

"No religion!" groaned another.

The gentlemen made involuntary attempts to button their coats, and the ladies produced smelling bottles, that looked like the series of vials predicted by St. John, only angels were not there to open them.

Conversation grew feeble, and again it was time to turn on the electric battery of the piano, so a male creature, full of youth and glitter, and smiles, and assurance, began to let off "chromatic aberrations."

The story of the Nihilist found immense favour,

and by the time it had passed through a dozen mouths and two dozen ears, it was gravely reported that a Russian Count was present, whose father was a political convict in Siberia. That said Count had come to England in order to study dynamite, and that he was the distinguished foreigner who sat by the Doctor, and who, judging from his face, was learning the theory of projection mathematically.

Then the signal was given to seek refreshments. And a right honourable something of somewhere, who had sat in the dumb distortions of repressed agony during the music, rose at a bound, and, offering his arm to the athletic young lady, said, "At length patience is rewarded, and I am called to the bar."

Miss Aramantha had some difficulty in folding her fan, and bestowed marked attention upon her chair for a few seconds, as if it had involved her in some entanglement, but as the Count did not come to the rescue, she accepted another offer, and received a lightning shaft from the maternal eye for her failure. The Doctor had disappeared with the illustrious Nihilist-Russian-Count, to the great relief of the nerves of some old ladies of both sexes, who were afraid the ice would explode under his touch. The Doctor had taken the foreigner to see a remarkable historical painting. They were away so long, that I imagine it was a little more than a full-length picture.

The Count went in with the herd of male creatures,

who, as one of them remarked, were relieved from the responsibility of luggage. The Poppit had popped herself out in some magical fashion, and was no more seen.

Amongst the male expediti was John Drawler, who was doing his best to soothe an alarmed and over-imaginative Low Churchman, who had been greatly exercised by a recent perversion to the Romish Church in Oxford. The said Low Churchman had a very hysterical theory that the Romish Church was spreading at the rate of so many miles an hour in this country, and would again deluge the green pastures of England in tears and blood, &c., &c., unless the millennium should come upon us by forced marches.

Drawler was pointing out that the age of superstition was past, and that the slate pencils and ink which were supplied by the board schools were of such excellent quality, that in themselves they would disinfect the human mind of that morbid fear which was the source of all Popish success. He had nearly raised his low friend to a state of comparative elevation, when down he went flop into thickest despair. The Drawler then turned to the Count, and asked—

"Do you think Popery will again become the ruling religion of the earth?"

"Certainly not," he said, "they signed their own death warrant years ago."

"When?" asked the Low Churchman, with a low gasp.

"When they constituted themselves into a hierarchy of cormorants," he replied.

"But," the low, lugubrious one said, "cormorants live, don't they?"

"Not long," said the Count, "and no Church of cormorants only could live a single generation. It is with Churches, as empires and individuals, they must perish, when they persist in violating the first law of life. Animals live for a day because they devour. Stars live for æons because they devour not."

"Is that Agnosticism?" asked the low man, with a frightened white look in the greater part of his eye.

"It is as nearly like it as riches are like aristocracy," said Drawler.

The low man opened his eyes, his nostrils, his mouth, slowly, solemnly, like five sepulchres out of which ghastly battalions of five inquisitions began the Dead March in Gall.

The Count heard the mustering forces, and wished that Popery and cormorants were embedded beneath the granite rocks in their native wilds of the Pacific. At that instant the "barristers" marched out, each with his bundle of anatomy, and the Count asked the low man whether he would take ice, or coffee, or both.

The low man said, with a voice as hollow as a

missionary-box, "Neither." The Count knew then that discretion was the better part of valour, and said, "Pardon me." Then he disappeared down the stairs, through the door, across the quadrangle, into his room, and "sported his oak."

CHAPTER XXXI.

LET no man of the world suppose that the Count was not aware that this was an informal proceeding. He knew it. But the music and the mockery had maddened him, and this was the only safe course to pursue. He knew they would attribute it to German boorishness or German transcendentalism, and it mattered not to him which.

He began to regret his German name, for now everybody thought of him as the German model. Every remark he made was interpreted by German sentiment, or German lack of sentiment, till he almost longed to tell them they were painted dummies, and though they had five senses, they were not able to use even one at a time.

He sat down, and neither thought, nor mused, nor dreamed, but was tossed by a tide of mad unrest, and, as is usual when tides toss, the waters were very muddy.

He felt still more keenly that he was out of harmony with this foreign civilization, and that, on the one point he had most carefully studied, he differed most widely from them. It seemed that his view of religion was not the view those took who

appeared to know best and to derive the greatest benefit from it. The pulpit said, It is not in me, and the drawing-rooms said, We have not heard the fame thereof with our ears. He felt that if life was a paste-board mockery, made hollow to remind men of a coffin, that it was the most exquisite torture yet conceived by an intelligent being. He looked from life to its highest embodiment—religion, and there he saw some beauty, much mechanism, but mainly death. The mighty and subtle forces of his complex nature had risen in revolt against a form of existence whose highest responsible function was to sign a cheque; he had grown weary of the monotony of trying to paint a bubble which should be of the hue exactly suited to his constitution and demands, but which invariably burst in the process; in weariness, and darkness, and despair, he had sat within a nation's mausoleum, when neither warrior nor sage, nor priest could fleck the encircling gloom with one spot of light. Death was everywhere; it darkened the earth with its pestilential wings, and destroyed the tribes of men and the empires of the world as toys of the moment. Our proudest triumph and wildest jubilee were but an ignorant acclamation that marked the course of decay.

Thus he felt. And feeling thus, he sat, as one pinioned with a shroud, gazing into thick darkness, and listening to the death march of centuries, whilst the skeleton of the past rattled in the coffin of the

future. Then, lo! a faint light broke through the gloom, and a rosy loveliness spread over man's burying-place.

It was his first glimpse of Life, and his midnight tears became dewdrops of the dawn. Every avenue was flushed with fascination, and the birthright of man was light, and the immortality of man was truth. Thus he felt. And feeling thus, he went to the priests of men, and the flowers of the race, assured that they had known for years of the true life, and so they could find delight in the round of human duty, and smile serenely in a world of sorrow.

But he found that they had turned the life of the Nazarene into a funeral hymn, and were quarrelling about the tune—whether they should sing it high or low or wide, in a national chorus or in sections, with a black gown on, as if they were sorry for it, or a white one, as if they rejoiced at it.

When we remember that he was young, that his view of life had seemed to solve every difficulty, and that when he had attempted to gain confirmation from others or impart it to them, he had failed utterly in both, can we marvel that he sat down and embalmed his despair in defiance?

* * * *

The hours sped on, and brought some coherency with them, and he determined upon one more effort to produce harmony between himself and those

around him. He would devote the long vacation to reading of a different type—in fact, study Christianity through its ordinary models and its ordinary literature.

* * * *

In a few days he had kept his term, and obtained permission to go down. He had a few words of formal farewell with his tutor, fewer still with Dr. Filledful, and he left his card with Mrs. double F.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THERE had been vague rumours at Oxford that London was empty this season, and so the Count thought possibly, under such conditions, it might be tolerable. But when he arrived the human tadpoles seemed thicker and blacker in their self-made pond than usual.

Mrs. Bam received him with all the sparkle and glitter of a set of new teeth. This amiable lady had accomplished some brilliant successes recently, and she wished to have the admiring approval of her son. We have been neglecting Mrs. Bam, but she has taken great care of herself. Early after the Count's departure to Oxford she set herself to organize a committee for the restoration of the Devil. Their method was simple. First, they were to have a body of active men scattered in every part of the civilized earth to look after the Devil, on the model of the Royal Humane Society. Second, they were to restore the Devil by denying that he ever died, if need be. But little reference was made to this death. They preferred the principle of ignoring it and affirming the contrary, which principle has done more to win the confidence of

mankind and the success of quackery than anything, except money.

Her committee was unique. In relation to herself, it was a natural product; in relation to the world, it was a hobby-horse that frightened fools and amused knaves; in relation to one another, it was an articulated piece of disappointment and vainglory, lubricated by the oil of delusion and deceit.

From amongst many nameless mummies who were the supple ministers of the leaders, some shone forth with the lustre of success.

There was Mr. Sliver, M.P., who had derived great aid from Mrs. Bam, who was the only person that outshone him in his own peculiar line of saying one thing, and leaving his hearers to discover whether he meant two or nothing; and also Mr. Cupboard, M.P., who probably owed his life to Mrs. Bam; for one day he was asked to stand godfather to a curate's baby. Poor Cupboard had just enough presence of mind to murmur something about "devil-father," and then swooned under the shock. In this condition Mrs. Bam found him, and, by the aid of blandishments in the form of spirit and water, she succeeded in recalling his spirit to this world of water, that women name tears. Dear Cubby, as the familiar spirits of drawing-rooms called him, felt he owed his life to the widow, and as he was a man of honour

with regard to his debts, he made her an offer of marriage.

General Tent-hook, the sanctified leader of the warriors of the "Sacred Drumstick," graced these meetings with his military phrases and his religious insight. His religion had all the advantages of a patent innoculation, and spread as fast as a matrimonial misunderstanding. The Bishops could not comprehend this mystery of a Drumstick; they were familiar with Dry-sticks, Queer-sticks, Crooked-sticks, Old-sticks, Rotten-sticks, and every Stick in the forest or Stick in the mud, but a Drum-stick was associated in their grand-motherly minds and step-fatherly hearts with the alarms of war or military licentiousness; but here was a Drum-stick that sent moral vibrations through the livers of men, and melted the fatty particles of degenerate hearts. Therefore Bishops, and M.P.'s, and Mayors, asked the Captains of companies to breakfast or tea, and General Tent-hook took care that the Monarch was not dead.

Beside these, there were the presidents and secretaries of certain benevolent societies, whose motto was Give, whose action was Take; a few elderly ladies, who thought that the world could be put right by tracts and soup, if they were only thin enough, and a resuscitated bishop from somewhere about the second century. This pious man was afraid the world did not stand still; he believed in

the incarnate past, and felt that the carnal present was the incarnate devil. He was often president of sub-committee No. 1, whose special function was to consolidate measures to prolong the life of the Devil. The two words did not mean the same thing, but they sounded alike, and Mrs. Bam believed in all sounds, except soundness; she had done so much by them.

These worthy people had afforded great profit and some amusement to Mrs. Bam, so that her domestic bereavement had passed lightly over her, or under her, or whichever way it had taken.

Her letters to her son were not of white heat in their tenderness, and there was a little smack of the whip, as from one who drove some large teams. The Count had been so busy that his letters had been brief, but filial.

There was a tinge of melancholy about their meeting, and the Count seemed involuntarily to cast his eyes round in search of the Monarch.

That evening Mrs. Bam held one of her evening-at-homes. This was indeed trying, and the Count felt it to be another step in the path of martyrdom; but he controlled the revolting forces, and took his place serenely. He found at first his task fairly easy; he had but to listen. Never in the struggle from apedom had the paper on any four walls gazed on so many odds and ends of humanity stowed away in so small a number of parcels. Nearly every

person there was a walking pantechnicon of faded memories and bleached emotions, gathered from every age and country. In some of them an idea or two was manifest by its peculiar opaqueness amongst the neutral gray surroundings. They were mainly responsible to their livers, and a collection of that leading article would have founded a museum. Naturally enough, they had some things in common, but not many. They could all hate; they could all tremble; they could all sign cheques. Each of them believed in a form of religion that must save the world, or nothing could.

To watch these dear creatures, as Mrs. Bam called them, simper, and smile, and cackle, whilst one knew that within twenty-four hours they would each have sent the rest to a hell of his own private upholstering, was indeed as curious as any specimens in the Ashmoleum.

The Count listened, or tried to; but occasionally he was interrogated, and must reply also occasionally. Nineteen times he was asked the same three questions—

Are you at Oxford?

Which College are you at?

Do you like it?

These are the three standing questions that everybody asks who has never been there himself; they are safe questions; there is a logical sequence

about them, and they manifest a wide and liberal interest in men, places, and things.

A Scotchman asked him how he liked Oxford College? Whether this arose from an uncanny thought that there was only one college at Oxford, or whether it was a triumphant display of national wit and economy, knocking the three questions into one, the Count could not determine, so he answered, with perfect truth and candour, "Not at all." Whereupon the Scotchman expressed his supremely northern satisfaction to discover so sensible a young man, for he himself was truly afraid of the Popish goings on at Oxford, and thought it was a pity that Cromwell did not move the college clean away to some locality unstained by Popish spires and Protestant ashes, &c., &c.

Then Mr. Sliver, with the privilege of one of the initiated, led the Count away, and introduced him to another initiated who had surrounded his religious instincts with that amount of adipose tissue which was supposed by a very special providence to protect abbots and ecclesiastical dignitaries in general. This sleek individual, who looked like a fat-cattle-show specimen hid away in broad cloth, had smeared his path of life with the unctuous name of Oilpin. The Count ventured to remark to Mr. Sliver that he thought he had arrived at a truer rendering of the dying Monarch's utterance about receivers *versus* deceivers. He explained it. The bright, lithesome

Mr. Sliver shuddered. Mr. Oilpin did not shudder; he never did. But a lugubrious wave of fat, slow alarm perambulated the adipose hills and valleys of the mountain in broad cloth.

At length this pulvinar of all the gods said, "My dear young sir, don't you know that God giveth all? Don't you ever say grace for what we are about to *receive?*" Not give, mark you. "Does not the Book say it is more blessed—ah! there is something wrong there. I think I have heard the words are changed or doubtful. But, above all, don't put yourself in the place of God. Receive, and be thankful."

The Count felt that the only fitting reply to this would be to paste an advertisement of Pears's Soap down his waistcoat buttons, and march him about to receive—attention. As he had not this useful article, he gave it up.

That night wore away, as all our nights of pleasure or anguish do. The party dispersed, and each went away to invent and circulate what they had not heard mixed with what they had.

The Count sought that last solace of our mad life—his own private room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COUNT went to the British Museum every morning for walks, as regularly as a city clerk goes to his perch. By dint of strong will, and fighting a pitched battle on an average once a day with some goat, who thought he was a member of society because he wore kids and had nothing to do, the Count secured that time for a course of reading which he had marked out on a gigantic scale. His conduct rendered him by no means popular, and reduced his position with Mrs. Bam to one of considerable tension. Society justly agrees to hate and condemn any young coxcomb who shall venture to question its sublime method of shuffling from the cradle to the grave: and to a lady of fashion or a woman of folly, perhaps a student's life is the most incomprehensible form of stupidity upon which she ever turns her nose.

Dear, distracted she-gnats, if they knew for one moment the delight of the search after knowledge,—if they knew the fragrant rapidity with which time flies under that operation,—they would even tear themselves away from the fatal fascination of inspecting other people's bonnets, and cease to fit

on their neighbour's garments, both in public and private.

So the Count read, and the time flew by.

He read theology — theology patristic, commentaries,—critical, historical, theology in any form or guise. So the summer nearly ended, but still he believed in the reality of Christianity,—in its power to change this gluttonous, murderous struggle of ours into purity and tenderness.

Weary of reading, weary of London, crushed beneath the weight of artificiality, the Count longed for some secluded corner, where he might breathe pure air and see human beings.

One morning, towards the end of August, he turned over an atlas, with no very definite purpose. The hills and woods were marked, and lines showed the railways. He became interested in trying to find vacancies clear of these lines, and in a district in the northern portion of the Midlands he saw one long line, traversing a vast tract, dotted here and there with woods. Then he thought he would go and live in one of those villages. There seemed a wider district around the old market town of Blamford than elsewhere; so he looked up Blamford in two or three directories, and found that, some five or six miles away, there was a small village called Brington, close to the old Roman road, with a barrow in the middle of it, where they used to bury their dead.

Two days after, with the minimum of luggage, he was at the railway station, and puzzled the clerk by asking if he could book through to Blamford. After some search, it turned out he could. In the early evening he found himself walking through the streets of this old-fashioned town, with its two thousand inhabitants and a mayor, who thought himself the ruler of the earth. It was not market day, and Blamford seemed as if it had been packed up for the millennium, but had been overlooked in the hurry, for there were plenty of dead and very little resurrection.

He called at an inn, and introduced some Blamford viands to his inner consciousness, and tested their skill in the art of making coffee. They served him up a compound of coal-dust and white-wash, such as one usually gets on these occasions. When an ordinary Englishwoman has acquired the habit of making coffee, our civilization will have advanced several stages beyond monogamy and capital punishment.

He then inquired the way to Brington, for the lovely evening aided his yearning to interview this nook at once. A small portmanteau was left behind, and, with a smaller in his hand, he fixed his nose in the direction of Nature, and felt a new man. He wore the worst tweed suit he possessed, and looked as if he might be anything between a peer on strike and a quack doctor on his rounds.

Nearly the whole way lay between pine woods, with here and there a break of fields, in which the ripe corn nodded in the evening breeze. The silence and beauty blended into a loveliness that was almost solemn in its deep calm.

He spent much time on his journey, and when he reached Brington he felt as if he had inhaled new life. For none but the tourist, who is young and strong, with enough of this world's goods and to spare, can know the charming novelty of walking through new scenery, and hunting for quarters in a fresh village.

What he knew of country inns he had gathered mainly from poets, and as they are far from a veracious tribe of men, he might have reflected that possibly he would find them a little more of the earth, earthy, than they appeared in rhyme or drama.

He soon walked through the two streets of Brington, and found it larger than he had expected. He went boldly to the largest public-house, and asked if he could lodge there. They said no; they had not a single room to spare. They sold ale, and they had a private parlour, where stronger fluids could be obtained, and this was what they meant by "good accommodation for travellers."

He tried the next, and the next, till he went to four, with the same result.

He felt at a loss to know what course to adopt.

But as he walked along he met a policeman, and accosted this rural representative of the majesty of government. He told the police-constable that he wanted lodgings, for a week or two, in any quiet, respectable place. This guardian of the rich and enemy of the poor, with a perfunctory indifference, indicated a cottage "round there" as likely. The Count smiled as he thought how easily he could rouse this official machine into activity by disclosing his rank, or by applying half-a-crown to the palm of that gentleman's hand. But, preferring to leave the dignity of English law in its natural rigidity, he asked the name of the people, and sought a little fuller instructions. He was answered that the man's name was Jack Hurstly, and as there was no other house in the lane he could not go wrong.

The Count easily found the house. In the dim light of a fragmentary moon it looked more than a cottage, for it had once been a sort of homestead to a very small farm, and though the farm had been annexed to another, the outbuildings remained, grown over with ivy and abutting on the house in a very misleading, if not hypocritical manner. The Count asked for John Hurstley, and found him in his shirt sleeves and in the act of taking an evening meal. He had been in the harvest-field all day, and he had just returned with his wife. The Count told his wish in a few simple words. John looked

at Ellen, his wife, and her eyes met his. They said more than the Count could read in the dim light. She spoke, and said they had a room they could spare, but it was harvest time, and she was out all day, and they were afraid he would not be very comfortable. But the Count said he should be out all day long, and he wanted a place to sleep at, more than anything, and he had no doubt he should be all right, and he would give them the least possible trouble. John added, that his mother was always at home, and the eldest girl would help to look after him, if a plain cottage was sufficient for him. John's mother, old Sarah sat there, looking the embodiment of domestic comfort without its varnish, and in the tidy, but plain, room the Count sniffed the air of those primeval qualities which were amongst the objects of his search.

What should he pay? There they were at a loss, for they had never had a lodger before. This difficulty seriously impeded the arrangement, till John suggested five shillings a week, which the Count said was not enough, and finally they agreed it should be seven. Then a solitary candle was lighted, and Ellen showed the Count into one of those little parlours which are always found in a certain strata of peasant life. The Count suggested, delicately, that as they did not know him, and he should need a little food, he would prefer to give her some money, and she might buy for him some butter,

and bread, and eggs, &c. So he gave her half-a-sovereign.

This novelty was delightful. He sat in one of those chairs which seem to have been invented as a test for the upright man, and wondered what lessons he should learn from this fresh experience of actual life.

He declined supper, except a supply of milk, and soon asked for his bed-room. This was plainer still —a low, rambling sort of room, without any carpet on its floor, a lonely chair, and an old-fashioned four-post bedstead, which had been the pride of former generations, but, like those generations, is very considerably despised now.

He had not been in this room long before he heard John commence "family prayer." He stood in profound silence, and listened to the yearnings of a strong man, blended with child-like confidence. For John approached God as a Father, and to him the Redeemer was verily an Elder Brother. The Count with difficulty restrained himself from going at once to grasp the hand of a man who lived in such fellowship with the Highest.

Prudence, however, prevailed, and, after long pondering, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEXT morning the Count rose early, but John and Ellen had risen earlier and gone to their daily work. From his room he looked down a winding lane, and as the morning sunshine fell upon his window, it seemed to him truly beautiful. That lovely sunshine which, in spite of theological inventions to the contrary, has scattered along the green lanes of every nation for untold ages, the message that God is the Father of all men and grudges nothing to His children.

In this bright light he sat down to breakfast. An aboriginal eight-day clock ticked in the corner, with the stately and hoary dignity of an Oxford examiner. As one listens to one of these measuring machines (I mean the clocks), one can almost believe that the days were longer when our grandfathers were children. On a small table was the usual large family Bible, with the peculiar appearance of having been used. On the chimney-piece were some rare porcelain objects, that must have been intended to represent obsolete specimens of natural history, for there were birds with golden buttons on their tails and dogs that seemed an even cross between a cur and all other animals. These and sundry objects were sources of

good-natured pleasantry to the Count, as he made a vigorous attack on a defenceless egg, that tried to elude his observation at the bottom of a wooden egg cup. His spoon refused to be driver and therefore he felt it must be *lead*. It was formed of that pliant metal which he had met with before, only in the legal conscience.

Breakfast over, he determined to go at once to Blamford and arrange for the village carrier to bring his portmanteau. As the old house possessed no front door he had to pass through the kitchen. There old Sarah was busy in the endless round of domestic trifles, which form so important a part of human life, and fill up the history of half our married women. He stopped to tell her he should not be in for any dinner, and to ask her to obtain certain articles that might be useful. He felt himself deeply interested in Sarah, and prolonged his stay by means of several kind inquiries. He learnt that there were five children in this family, two that could not walk, the baby because it had not yet had a fair chance of acquiring that art, being only some seven months old, and the eldest boy, Johnny, because last year he had got entangled in a reaper which compelled them to amputate both his feet. There he sat in the corner, not yet six years old, with a bright happy face, as yet all unconscious of the frightful fetters he must carry in the race of life. The Count talked with him and soon won his full confidence.

This maimed boy's presence roused some inscrutable question in the Count's mind, on the penalty of matter and the penalty of relationship. The loss of a limb or the acquisition of an estate *seems* to wheel us into vastly different angles with the eternal vista which swallows up alike peasants and empires.

The Count obtained some directions from Sarah about the neighbourhood and the way to the Brington woods, which were the real cause of the Count's ever seeing Brington.

But as Mary, John's eldest child, a girl about eight, was just ready to start with a relay of tea and food for the harvesters, Sarah said she would be able to show him the turn to the best entrance as she passed on her way to the harvest-field.

The proper name of these woods was Wortborough Woods. The family of Wortborough had once been powerful and had acquired these woods by marriage with an heiress, one of whose ancestors received them as a gift from Queen Bess, because, as an incorruptible judge, he had helped that Royal Saint to murder Mary without having to give an account of it—at least *here*.

One vast avenue of towering pines and gnarled oaks, called The Drive, extended for five miles from Wortborough Hall in the direction of Blamford.

The entrance to the woods from Brington was about midway between the two extreme points—the hall and the lodge, opening on the high road to

Blamford. It was an old narrow bridle path winding round sandy knolls and oaks that seemed old enough to have sheltered the priests of time, when time was the only gentleman that occupied this world.

Here the Count rambled and revelled, delighted and dazed alike by the loveliness of the countless glades, where the bracken was fading into beauty, and by the shadowy silence sleeping beneath the trees.

After some lapse of time, he knew not how great, he found himself near the old hall of the Wortboroughs.

This hall had been shut up some fifteen years. The shutters were closed, and the gardens a tangle. There the rabbits fed. The stables and kennels were yielding to decay and had the uncomfortable air of a workhouse. One small part of a stable had been converted into a cottage for the keeper, and near the old entrance to the gardens the Count found this august person. He was a man with red whiskers and a freckled face, and had lounged about the old hall and through the older woods so long, as the family representative, that he acted as if he felt that really the place belonged to him. He answered the Count's inquiries in monosyllables that seemed to be rendered still shorter by the brusque way in which he bit them off.

The Count felt that this man must be won over, otherwise he might be a nuisance to him in some of

his rambles. So he asked for much information about dogs, game, and poaching. The man seemed to be considerably mollified by the familiar sound of his own voice, and when the Count offered him a cigar, a gingery sort of smile, that rose somewhere amongst the root of his whiskers, spread over the rest of his face, till the freckles caught a redder hue. The Count then discussed the Wortboroughs, and as he had got them up in the directories afore-named, he knew a good deal more of them and their haunts than the keeper. Besides, a Miss Greseby de Grill Wortborough was known to him by sight. This lady had squandered the grace of her youth and the surplus of her fortune on the turf, and had brought her wrinkles and her scars as a peace-offering to the nether gods before she should be called upon to interview them. She found Mrs. Bam a great consolation, and by the aid of that expert repertory of ready-made saintliness, she hoped to gull both this world and the next. The Count made a trifling reference to this lady, and the keeper had again taken refuge in monosyllables, but now they were so lengthened by awe, that they would have been cut in half by any careful lexicographer. No dependent in this vast estate had ever seen a Wortborough, and, therefore, for this keeper to stand face to face with one who had, was an apocalypse of wonder he had never expected to witness outside a game bag.

He offered to show the Count the hall. The Count

said he should be pleased to look over it another day, as he was going to stay a few weeks in the neighbourhood. He inquired the route for Blamford and wandered in that direction.

He caught many a vision of rapture, as he walked through that vast avenue, which seemed sacred to every sylvan deity.

When at length he reached Blamford, he was reminded it was Saturday afternoon, by the unusual excitement which one Time-shadow manifested to sell various bundles of the phenomenal to other Time-shadows. And a Time-shadow in a woman's shawl and bonnet, with a voice thin and harsh, as if the shadow were conscious that it would soon vanish into a winter's night, shrieked and shook her spectral hands at another Time-shadow (only shorter and thicker), because he wanted a penny a pound more for the phenomenal, than female-time-shadow's economy or necessity could spend.

This process is known, on week-days, by the name of marketing. The Count was jostled here and there. Exultant ululation of "Sold again! Sold again!" Moaning remonstrances about the paucity of "coppers," the toughness of meat, the hardness of hearts, were mixed in more than Babel confusion. Here was self-preservation till the air was fetid with it, and the Count was looking for the nearest place of egress, when he met a pale, lean woman carrying a pale, lean baby, looking as if famine were making a

feeble attempt to rear death. She was so spectral, that in a trance or an allegorical painting, she would have looked ethereal. But, in this coarse reality, any well-fed person by her side looked like a body snatcher, and it almost seemed as if some philanthropist had imported her, clothes and all, to be placed as a scarecrow amongst skeletons to keep off the said body snatchers, but that having found the occupation monotonous, she had escaped.

The Count turned and followed her. She paused before a meat-stall less attractive than many, and looked like a morally coerced vulture, whose instincts had dwindled into glaring. At length she found a small piece of flesh dark with the hue of antiquity and waited with patience till she should attract the attention of the seller from more promising customers. She asked him, "How much?"

He said, "Sevenpence."

She suggested, "Sixpence?"

He said, "No."

She pleaded, "Take sixpence, this time, master."

He lost his temper.

The Count advanced and pointing to the most "beautiful piece of meat" there, said, in royal accents, "Will you weigh that?"

The seller threatened ruin to his trade by nearly swallowing his knife, and forgot his shilling customers, like a judge forgets the haggard criminal when he sits down to dinner.

"Three and sixpence, sir," he said.

The Count threw down two half-crowns. The man respectfully folded up the purchase in paper and with profound deference handed it and the change to the stranger.

The woman meantime had found a smaller and darker piece.

The Count turned to her with the parcel and the change, and said, with the tenderest smile, "Please, take this."

The bony hand was mechanically held out and her lips were sealed with astonishment, but her eyes glistened with the lovely light which painters strive after, when they would represent the adoration of kneeling saints.

The Count had left the market and saw not her grateful tears. The portmanteau had been despatched by that ancient vehicle known as a carrier's cart. It must be a Teutonic invention. I wish some reader would give me an account of its origin.

Again he was on his way to Brington, this time by a field-path, now through mellow-corn, now across pastures where the happy cattle rested. Everywhere slept peace and fragrance, and the cloudless sky seemed the blue dome of an ancient temple filled with the incense of silence, sacred and sweet peopled with spirits that rested on their wings, lest they should ruffle its solemn calm.

When he arrived, he found John and Ellen partaking of a frugal supper, that seemed nearly ended. He had brought a book for Johnny and cakes for the children, but as they were all in sweet sleep, he keep his secret.

John and his wife seemed tired and grave, but he attributed it to the long day's work.

Old Sarah had made some purchases for him and asked him about supper, but he said he would have a little bread in addition to milk as the night before, and he asked to be allowed to sit down and have it there.

He talked with them about the neighbourhood, the harvest, the hard work, &c. John said—

"It is trying in harvest, but thank God, to-morrow is the blessed Sabbath," and illumination seemed to fall on the tired face.

"Will you join us, sir, in our family prayer? We always have a few words of prayer before we go to bed."

"I should like very much to join you, whenever I am in the house," said the Count.

They knelt down, and the "common working man" spoke simply and directly to the Father of the universe, as if he were His own and only child. Some passionate yearnings broke forth, and then he committed them individually to "One who neither slumbers nor sleeps."

The Count wished them good night, and went to his bed-room, where he thought long about John. The childlike confidence, perhaps, was natural, perhaps also, the almost idyllic poetry of many of his utterances, but that terrible longing, that cry for help, as full of pathos and doom as a Greek tragedy, whence did it arise?

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE COUNT was up even earlier than usual next morning. He was somewhat restless. He wished to talk with John about many things, but he feared lest he should frighten him into silence, if he made the attempt too soon. He took a stroll in the lane before breakfast. Every blade of grass seemed a fount of freshness then.

He determined to give as little trouble to this family as possible, on this their only day of rest.

When he returned, Sarah was busy with some simple preparations for breakfast. The children were running about almost as unconsciously happy as the sunbeams. The tired pair were not down.

The Count had his repast. The children accomplished the same with marked despatch. The Count had some talk with Johnny, and threw a new delight over that young existence by producing the book he had bought. The children disposed of the cakes with that ready accommodation of early gastric power, which appears some compensation, if not the reward, of plain living.

Then he hurried away to the woods. There he lingered, and bright visions encircled him, as if the spirits of dawn were waking for a jubilee.

At length he reached Blamford, and made straight to the oldest and largest church. It seemed to him that incalculable benefit was conferred upon a mercantile nation, by having a fixed time and place for showing the power of the race in the art of dress.

If Sunday were abolished, surely trade would languish in this country. After he had sat a few minutes, he wondered where the poor of Blamford worshipped. Had they given it up? Did they feel that slaves had no right to mingle with their lords on that particular occasion, which showed their inferiority to the assembled multitude? Probably many of them were not awake; at any rate, they were not there.

It was one of those services which is called old-fashioned, and perhaps rightly, for it must have been fashioned at a remote time, and probably by an antiquarian committee, or a firm for pickling fossils. A middle-aged man went through the pious routine with the stateliness of a sacred elephant, and the precision of a new sewing-machine. The sermon was brief, without emotion, without a thought, without a flaw. It would have been equally suitable to any age and any congregation in the history of the world.

The people departed, apparently well pleased that their sins and their souls had alike been ignored. Their respectability had been consecrated, and *it*

was so complacent, so permanent, that they might well mistake it for a part of the Divine order of the universe. The Count was not so used to it, and he longed intensely to see the meaning of it all.

He sought his only balm—solitude.

In the early evening he returned to Brington. John and Ellen were at chapel. Sarah was minding the house and the baby, but she found time to read occasionally in an old Bible lying on the table near her. The Count sat down to talk with her. She seemed pleased and conversed freely. He spoke of the past of Brington, and made inquiries that brought out her own history.

She was sixty-four, and had been bred and born in Brington. She had three married daughters in the neighbourhood. Of her sons, John was the only one left. One had been drowned at sea, another, a soldier, had fallen in India. She ran on with an account of their strength, their stature, their goodness, the strange mystery that they should leave her. How the old face changed, as the big tears silently rolled down her cheeks! Nearly all the memories of her life had been steeped in tears. At length she proceeded—

She had buried two young children, two round-faced boys, when the fever was so bad. They were in Brington Church-yard. Her old man was carried to Brington Church-yard five years ago last spring. He took a violent cold whilst "ditching," and never

recovered. She had married him when she was twenty, and they had struggled to rear their children to be honest, hard-working men and women. The tears fell faster as she sat speechless. No marvel. It was the resurrection of forty-four years, more than a generation, passed in mortal combat, whose Rembrandt hues had been relieved only by the fires of anguish.

The Count sat as speechless as she. He felt an undefinable awe in her presence. All the interests, passions, and tragedy of a life passed in funereal pomp before him. He thought that now he could interpret the singular gleam of those aged eyes.

She knew nothing what the world deems worth knowing. Her position was an unknown quantity in the world's estimation. She had no power, no privileges, no rights, except that small bundle of negatives, which the State allots to each being in human form to maintain "the sacredness of life." In short, the Squire could *not* shoot her, and escape an inquest. She might work, or starve, or weep, but she might *not* commit suicide. She was a human being! Transcendant privilege!

No subtle problems had ever tired her brain. She had bestowed no thoughts on primæval monads, or the origin of matter. But all the training, discipline, and culture, which that something, formerly called soul or spirit, can acquire, whilst lodging a few moments amidst time-shadows, she had acquired.

And like the rest of us, when the barren past buries the present beneath its scorching sand, she looked forward to the light of immortality to scatter the mists which thicken around us with every departing year.

As this funereal procession passed before the Count, the twilight deepened, but shadows softer and more solemn seemed to settle on the aged face, as it grew calm and looked far off to catch the morrow's dawning immortality.

At length they spoke again, and this time of John. She had a great trouble. She thought she was not useful. She could not work as she used to, and she feared she was a burden to John and Ellen. They were kind to her, but there were many mouths to fill, and she wished herself away sometimes. Yet there was no help, for the poor law guardians would compel him to support her, even if she left him in order that he might have a less burden to carry. Then the past year had been very severe for John. First came the accident to the boy, which brought expense and grief to his father. The tired man had given many sleepless hours to watching his boy till he recovered, and even now, often his eyes would fill with tears, as he wondered how the maimed victim would struggle through life. Then again last winter had been remarkably wet, and for weeks they were not able to go on the land, and John had no work. He received fifteen shillings a week for full work,

but during the long winter, he soon spent his very small funds, and lived in a state just above starvation. Spring brought work, and he bought a pig, but it died within a week, and many a morning John had dry bread for breakfast, and took dry bread with him for his dinner. The last half-year's rent had not been paid, and they were afraid every day lest the agent would demand it, as he had written an urgent and angry letter more than a week ago.

The Count watched the troubled face, as Sarah told of the poverty that oppressed them. She did not repine, she did not look for help, her only hope was in the harvest wages and that next winter might be better than the last.

The Count said he should not take supper, and retired to his room. He was very much disturbed. The day had been varied, but many things had jarred upon him. So many things were wrong and there seemed no reason why they should be. Why should an incarnate God have established a religion in the world, which He must have supposed would benefit mankind, and yet in this enlightened generation it had become a sheeted skeleton that went through the operation of pretending to feed the people merely to show the mechanical dignity with which a skeleton can move?

Why should this honest, toiling man live in dread of something worse than death, because of a paltry few pounds, whilst the owner of his cottage lived at

a remote distance, and if he were a very good man, would give the few pounds towards beautifying a new chancel, and if he were not, they would help to pay for the last bin of port, with which he meant to astonish those fickle swine that prosperous men call friends ?

Why . . . . ? Why . . . . ? &c., &c.,

The Count exhausted himself with interrogatives, whilst the fragmentary moon, slowly increasing in size, seemed to live in laughter, and old mother nature went her rounds with the lovely serenity of a deaf and blind step-mother, who is not going to be put out by other people's children. Religion at Brington and Blamford and at all the other tons and fords for many a moonlight mile, had been folded up and put away for seven nights and six days, with the vain hope that it might improve by resting undisturbed and out of sight.

So shall it be for ever, unless this world is resolved into a floating gas.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ENGLISH people say they believe in the God of the widow and orphan, and perhaps this venerable superstition accounts for the fact that they are unwilling to examine the arrangements of workhouses and unions, because they are afraid of interfering with the comfort of the privileged beings who are God's Special Care. It may be they are jealous of that Divine protection and consolation being given so freely, whilst they are conscious that they themselves have no share of, or claim to, either.

Therefore they build large, uncomfortable houses, as shrines to the Fatherhood of God, but with the cringing awe of ignorant devotees they themselves remain at a distance and enter not, lest they should pollute with flesh and blood these shrines of pure and Divine effulgence. And so it comes to pass that, in our gilded saintliness and hallowed enjoyments, we pay the poor rate and thank God we are not as other men!

If you have never watched your young children at play whilst you trembled for their future—if you have never felt the tears welling upwards, as you reflected that by one untimely stroke they would be paupers,

do not expect to understand this chapter. You can have no conception of a life passed without hope of any better condition—passed, surrounded with every spectre of want and helplessness. This is to *dwell* in the valley and shadow of death.

This is the life of the majority in this country.

Do you wonder that they make a religion for themselves, and leave prosperous men to buy as many shares as they like in the bubble companies of unworked saintliness?

You may consider it Monday morning, and the above mild and unobtrusive reflections to have passed through the Count's mind whilst he was deploying a very soft metallic spoon around the recesses of an egg, in a way that he was gradually growing accustomed to. Probably they will appear to be sufficiently explained by the ignorance of a foreigner, spiced with the malice of a Devil.

The Count ascertained the name of the agent who was the embodiment of destiny to John Hurstley and his family, and was thinking of the simplest plan of paying the half-year's rent and telling Sarah she need no longer fear that John's home would be broken up for the sake of the four pounds due to the landlord.

A heavy rain in the early morning had put a stop to harvesting. Many of the men had gone to the fields to see what prospect there was of doing any work after dinner, whilst the women and children

remained at home. The Count sat on the mound of ancient dead, which is now covered with exceedingly fine grass and regarded as a favourite lounge for the rising Bringtonians. He had taken some of his long journeys in fancy-land, in which the skeletons of the mound were strangely mixed up with ripe corn and family prayers. He had, in fact, set himself that very hard task of trying to realize the world a thousand years before he entered it and a thousand years after he should have left it.

The weather seemed better, and he thought he might return to the house and start for one of his long rambles.

As he came suddenly upon the cottage he saw Ellen busy preparing potatoes for dinner and the tears running down her cheeks, whilst little Mary, scarcely two years of age, was clinging to her gown and saying, "What you cry for, mammy?"

It was too late to conceal the fact that he had witnessed this, so entering the house he spoke kindly to her and asked what was wrong. She was in doubt and hesitated a little, but Sarah said a letter had come from the lawyer demanding the four pounds for the half-year's rent within a week. The Count asked to see the letter. It was the usual device. The agent had asked the lawyer to demand the money and charge his "three and sixpence" for doing so, as being a shorter plan than the County Court.

Ellen wept and old Sarah wept, the children also

caught the alarm, and this cottage which he had left in peace, was changed into a very den of terror.

The Count turned to Ellen and assured her it could soon be put all right, but she seemed inconsolable. They could not pay it till the harvest-money came in, which would be more than another fortnight, and even then wages had been so screwed down, that something else must go unpaid, and this trouble would overtake them and their home must go. She sobbed violently and made incoherent remarks about John coming home to find all this trouble, and about her lame child being turned into the streets.

The Count was deeply moved. He had not witnessed such terrible grief and such helpless terror.

He told her he was going to Blamford that morning, and if she would let him take the letter, he would call upon the lawyer and pay it. He said he should wish to make them all a small present before he left, and he hoped she would let this be the present. Her face became radiant with astonishment and gratitude. A whirling ecstasy had transformed her life, and she and her mother poured forth their thanks.

The Count hurried away to Blamford. He felt that to be weak and poor is the heaviest burden of earthly existence, and God Himself could never have known the burden of human life, unless He had become weak and poor.

He paid the money to a clerk, who believed in the Divine right of law to support the strong, and who

was perhaps a trifle disappointed because the case had so soon come to an end.

He returned early to Brington and found the cottage serene and its inmates smiling. He gave the receipt to Ellen as he passed through to his room. Heavy showers had prevented the men from working, and from his bed-room window he saw John in the garden, so he went down to see him. He found John gazing into the empty and ill-fated pig-stye, apparently not altogether at his ease, but he turned and thanked the Count as he heard his approach.

The Count, guessing his thoughts, said, "I am sorry to hear of your loss."

He said, "You mean the pig, sir. It was a bad job. But I seem to have had a run of bad luck. It is no fault of mine, I hope, sir. And now you have helped us to day, I think we shall struggle through. But the worst is poor Johnny. Nothing can give him his feet back."

His lips quivered with emotion, as he said this, and he turned half away as if to conceal it.

The Count said, "I am sorry, very sorry for you all, but we must hope something may be done for Johnny."

"Yes, sir; but it is hard to bear. You see, if I could send him to school a long while, he would maybe learn enough to get his living by. But what with one thing and another, I can hardly get them bread."

The tall, strong man, not yet thirty, seemed to bow beneath his load. When working men learn how to abstain from marriage till they are thirty they will be the rulers of the nation.

To the Count, with his sublime ideas of human destiny, and his unshaken faith in the sacred struggle of the race for an everlasting triumph, there was a large element of the ludicrous in the fact that the death of a very obscure swine should affect the fate, possibly the immortal life, of a whole family. He saw the shade of that swine running athwart the quiverless lustre, which some day shall clothe the whole race of Hurstleys in the radiance of life, and though he would rather have talked theosophy with this native seer, he asked, hopefully and calmly, "Well, John, don't you think you could buy another pig?"

John shook his head and said, "They are dear now, sir, and they are going to make me pay for the other. I bought it of farmer Dryfist, for a pound. I only had it three days and it died. So did the whole litter before he could sell another. I have seen him, and tried to get off by paying half, but he says, "No; a bargain is a bargain," and I must pay, and I got a County Court summons, so there will be more expense."

"But this is gross injustice," said the Count. "Can you not employ a solicitor, and surely you would win your case in court?"

"I employ a lawyer!" gasped the astonished John.

"What lawyer would plead for me against farmer Dryfist? I have no money to pay him, and he would charge more than would pay the bill."

More light for the Count. Why, of course, to the majority in this happy country there is *no legal redress* for the petty injustice which may be daily heaped upon them. A new phase of the Christian brotherhood this! It may well be so hard to teach the depraved mob to say "Our Father!"

He pointed out that his three weeks' lodgings there would come to the sum needed, and so he asked for the summons, and said he would settle it to-morrow, if John would allow him.

John burst into tears like a child, and *murmured* something about "thanks to his Heavenly Father."

The Count escaped, as he always did on these occasions.

He sat in the twilight, and thought that he had witnessed the struggle of all that is best on earth: the heart filled with passionate yearning for the Unknown, burning with devotion to the Invisible, whilst the fibres of being are snapping under the severe tension of having to find a slice of bacon for to-morrow's dinner. Such is the whole riddle. Harmonize the two, and you have found the elixir of life, and neither earth nor heaven has aught more to grant.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COUNT went to Blamford, and interviewed another man of law, and settled the claims of Dryfist.

He had found out that Johnnie's ambition culminated in a box of tools, in order to play at carpentering: these he purchased.

He went in for the mode of life he had learnt at Oxford, *i.e.*, he ordered fresh food every day, and said he did not require it to be sent in a second time, so that he kept the astonished family fairly well supplied with many articles.

The house seemed changed. He spent much time with the children, to whom he seemed more than human. Sarah felt a loyal gratitude to him such as is never looked for outside of a romance.

Saturday had arrived, and as this day is always devoted, in properly conducted cottages, to the lares of newly-washed bricks and well-rubbed furniture, the Count rambled to the woods, and went over the old hall with the red-visaged keeper. Here it was the opposite of Saturday afternoon, and it was difficult to realize that ever any human beings had scrubbed those floors or laughed and talked in the vast recesses of the windows. It seemed like the

lair of forlorn fortunes, and roused the Count inexpressibly.

The Count left it, and when the afternoon sun was going down he sat, apart from pathways, on the trunk of a tree, where was a small space cleared of timber.

A solitary robin sang the summer's dirge, which is the most mournful voice of Nature. The sun strayed through the hazel copse, and lingered on the fading bracken, not casting shadows, so much as tracing the images of life—thrilling in their pathos, enthralling in their sadness. All the hushed voices whose vibrations send waves of mournful ecstasy through the soul of man whispered in his ear as they sank into silence in that corridor of decay. Nature, the Sibyl of Time, hath indeed placed her inscriptions on the leaves of the forest, and as these decay and drop to their grave the autumnal air becomes laden with sadness; for her mystic messages, all unread, steal back to their secret dwelling-place, whence comes the fragrance of the violet and the glitter of the snow. Oh! Life, nowhere in thine effulgent halls of thronging pageantry, breathes there a loveliness which so transfigures the soul of man, as that which exhales in beauty, when a single sunbeam kisses the face of decay! It is the loveliness born of the solitude of the mountain and the woodland; its cradle is amongst harebells and anemones; there, rocked by

the fragrance of summer, it slumbers, till autumn unveils its witchery, and then you may see it—yea, feel it—fleet as a fawn, sweeping through avenues of silence, clad in the sanctity of sadness, gazing once on the face of man, then dying to rest for ever, where sleeps the beauty of last year's lilies. As he sat in that eclipse of life, and her blinding splendours were veiled in sadness, his heart rested beneath a shelter of shaded light, as if in the hollow of the outspread seraph's wing.

His spirit soared in the radiant light of enchantment. The tides of memory tossed the faces of childhood, wet with the spray of death and white in their shrouds of vanished hopes.

It was an instant of resurrection. The pensive moment flashed into a flame of life too bright, for all the ashes of the past were blown together, and blazed as they met.

The sun sank; voices of returning harvesters woke the echoes of the wood, and roused him from his reverie.

Sunday morning broke with the loveliness that blends the glory of summer with some of the mellowness of autumn.

The Count rose early; so did John Hurstley. Their simple breakfast was over, and John asked the Count to read the chapter. He had opened the Bible at the 17th of St. John's Gospel, and the Count read this sublime utterance—full of the music

and mystery of another world—with deep emotion. He had never realized how near the Incarnation had brought God to man till that moment.

This simple cottage, where toil and care stood still and rested from their week-day agitation, was suffused with the healing presence of the Man of Sorrows. Insensibly his mind visited the Carpenter's home, and if the Nazarene had entered at that moment perchance not one of them would have been startled.

The children sat in silent reverence; tears of secret gratitude and hope stole down their mother's face.

John felt the dawning of that rapture which so often transfigured his Sabbaths; whilst a mellow light seemed verily visible on the worn face of old Sarah, as if the eternal sunshine was lingering, only to ripen the earthly life into the image of the Invisible.

They knelt down, and John poured forth a prayer of yearning and thankfulness such as the angels could never utter.

The Count was stirred with almost uncontrollable emotion, and he hurried out into the lane, where only sunshine and birds were, and the light and the music seemed even more sacred than the night before.

The Count wandered on, lost in amazement. He had obtained knowledge which no reasoning, no reading, no thought, could have imparted. He

had seen and felt that the life of Christ was a reality, and that the one astounding miracle of the Incarnation was still with us. He knew that John's creed would have been condemned as unsatisfactory, —probably as heresy,—by every *doctor* of divinity of the last fifteen hundred years, but he knew also that Christ deemed creeds of secondary importance, unless, indeed, *He* made the *mistake* of teaching the world things of small value, and leaving after-ages to fabricate the lengthy formularies which no saved soul might doubt.

The mystery thickened around him as he thought of the ages of Church organization, which had resulted in political cardinals and right reverend peers; that organization would appear necessary, and yet, when its history was read in the light of the one lowly Divine Life, it seemed that men who were eager to build a temple to God had only reared a gigantic scaffolding upon which they might gibbet His saints.

He felt keen anguish in grappling with this problem that baffled him. It was not scorn, or bitterness, or disappointment that made life a desert by its own simoon, and then shrieked itself hoarse in bewailing an empty world. He had dwelt on the life of Christ till he felt it was true, and till he believed that the Man of Sorrows had intended to bring balm to the broken-hearted children of sorrow who fill the world. Then, unexpectedly, he had

found a family, living in the deepest poverty, struggling with disease and care, with no hope of any better lot, and with great probability of a worse, yet they were citizens that would adorn any nation; they were Christians that would adorn any Church; they lived a life of self-sacrifice, of contentment, of faith in the supreme victory of right—all this, and much more, simply because they had read the life of a Carpenter's Son and believed it.

These two facts were clear, but the intervening history was not. He seemed to get a truer view of Gospel from the life of John Hurstley, than from that of the Rev. Steady Swig. But in a history of the last sixteen hundred years, amongst those who had accepted Christianity, "The Swig" was far more numerous than "The Hurstley," and if the Hurstley view is at all correct, then untold anguish must await every Christian nation, when it shall awaken from its dream of selfishness and self-delusion.

A cloud had come over the Count's fair landscape, and he felt as if pursued by some relentless fury, when the bells of Brington began their morning peal. Then all the foul strife and struggle fled, and a delicious dream-ecstasy filled him with ineffable delight.

He obeyed the summons, and wended his way quietly towards the church. It was one of the countless number of churches which seem gray with

the shadows of past generations, and in such natural harmony with all that surrounds them, that one feels they must have been there always. The dead clustered more thickly around it than the living. To a large bulk of the village, the bells had no message, and as they ceased, the Count entered, to find a large building with many old-fashioned, high-backed pews, which seem to have been made with the pious intention of strengthening our faith, because they are barriers to sight. He was the sole occupant of one of these large boxes, and when he stood up, several were apparently empty. It was a church capable of very great attractions, if it had been required for anything useful. But the people of Brington either stayed away, or revered it as a mausoleum for their dead creeds.

The Rev. George Denfer Stonehouse had been vicar for a whole generation. He was a J.P., and wealthy. He had married an heiress soon after an uncle had purchased for him Brington living, and their children formed a large contribution to the aristocracy of the neighbourhood. The attitude of Mrs. Stonehouse was that of a well-bred and very successful lady of fashion, and her whole method may be learnt from the single fact, that if the Count had disclosed his position in society, he would have been offered every hospitality at the vicarage which frozen etiquette could sanction, but if he had not made that disclosure, he might have bared his head

in distant respect whenever he had passed her, and felt that he was richly rewarded if she set in motion the elaborate machinery by which she brought her chin one-eighth of an inch nearer the ground, in token of his salutation. Those who knew the vicar, believed that he was a good man, but as this was a select circle, the majority of his parishioners held their own views about him, and if they could have written his life, no member of the family of Stonehouse would have recognized it as belonging to the vicar of Brington.

But he was liberal in supplying soup or wine to the sick, and if they died, he buried them with becoming gravity. He allowed them to make a more fervid religion for themselves, if they found the fare at the Parish Church too cold or too mouldy.

His irreproachable, gentlemanly life, had been uneventful, and he had received a full portion of this world's sunshine.

This morning he rose with calm decorum and crystalline serenity, as he had risen for a quarter of a century.

Beneath the reading desk sat the old clerk, with a nose that seemed to have been stained originally with red tape, and which now was gradually deepening into blue discontent at the abolition of tithes. With the plaintive remonstrance of an injured sheep, he reminded the congregation when each prayer ended.

The service was conducted on that well-known model which has justly earned the name of an "ecclesiastical patent for emptying churches." It comprised matins to the third collect, the litany, and the ante-communion office. This whole service and two halves, carefully packed with appropriate hymns, and lengthened out with the prayer for Parliament, and any special collect that could be squeezed in, had been the uniform method to suppress fervent devotion in use at Brington for an unknown period. And it had met with all the success that its promoters could desire.

Then came a sermon on the immorality of Saul for not hewing Agag in pieces, of nine minutes' duration—equally divided into three parts of three minutes each. The first stage was a paraphrase of the Bible narrative; the second, a simple exposition of what it meant; the third, a string of odds and ends of various collects, every other sentence beginning with *may*, and expressing the Vicar's pious wish for what we *may* do here, and where we *may* go hereafter.

The snow-flakes ceased to fall.

Another hymn—another collect—a stately blessing.

Frozen silence.

Such was the Brington Sunday morning programme. In spite of weather, of temperature, of weakness or infirmity, the worshipper had his choice between this dusty journey and nothing.

If he wished to join the half-dozen people who stayed for monthly celebration, he must be prepared to *add* that to the already superhuman effort.

Clouds of thick darkness gathered over the Count, and as he left this sacred refrigerator, he felt that "The Liberation Society" must have been originated in a Parish Church.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE village of Brington contained some twelve hundred inhabitants, and the vicar thought it furthered the cause of public morality and domestic virtues to have no service in the evening. His parishioners did not altogether endorse these sentiments, and therefore they had provided two chapels for themselves, and in them was to be found what of spiritual life the villagers possessed. One was a chapel of the Weslyuns before referred to, and worked in a peculiar relationship with the Church. Its shining lights were many of them in the vicar's choir, and were to be found regularly in church every Sunday morning. They were the patrons of justification by faith in its crystallized form, and they indulged in certain little frailties, such as believing that their ministers were educated and ordained. They had a vague notion that the Church either reared John Wesley, or that John Wesley reared the Church. It did not matter which, they felt the two were inseparably connected, and that the world would have come to an end long ago, if it had not been for that union. There were others who were not shining lights in that respect-

able, inflated sense. These were the useful, or the scavengers, the people who had to support week-night prayer meeting, and do the shouting at revival services.

Unfortunately, John Hurstley belonged to neither of these great divisions of human nature. He was a "member" at a smaller chapel, one of the numerous fortieth cousins of original Methodism. At this small chapel John was by no means a front rank man, as far as his Sunday suit went, but he was respected for his sincerity, his blameless life, and his religious fervour. And many a man in Brington, who would not have met John at dinner, would gladly have forfeited all dining privileges, if he could have had Jack's child-like simplicity and calm faith.

The Count had learnt many things to this effect, beside what he himself had witnessed, and therefore, when he learnt that Jack was to preach in the little chapel that night he determined to go.

As he went to chapel, the autumn mist that trailed amongst the trees and half veiled the stubbled fields, roused him as if it were the floating incense of illimitable mystery swung by some invisible hand in eternal worship. Voiceless yearnings of a dumb ecstatic anguish filled him with seething tumult. The inarticulate utterance of nature fell upon him with an appeal more powerful than speech or pomp could express.

The dream was so vast and magnificent—the life so narrow and mean.

He entered amongst these lowly worshippers, to whom the loss of a week's work was of greater importance than the overthrow of an empire. Many were there, attracted by the preacher. The opening hymn was rendered with vigour. John prayed with an intense earnestness, but he was not boisterous, though now and again some of the congregation practised their lungs with telling vibration. Then came the second hymn, during the singing of which John did not seem quite so much at his ease.

Perhaps no occasion more trying could be. Much of the success of every religion has finally depended upon the mystery of its priests, and the elaboration of awe, called Ritual. Consider then the keen scrutiny of such a service as this. Every one knew John. They had come to listen to him for a few minutes, but they saw his life day after day, where every utterance and look were subjected to that prying and familiar gaze, from which poverty offers no shelter. What countless kings, prophets, and priests would be hurled to the dust in contempt and disgrace, if men might but see and touch one day's history, stripped of its darkness of superstition, or its magnificence of pageantry!

This cottager-priest must then have some power that may, perchance, turn out to be part of the universe, in those distant ages when the man of

culture shall be sufficiently educated to examine into its nature.

He took for his text, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness," &c.

A bold text in the face of people under whose very eyes his whole life was passed! He spoke of St. Paul with a familiarity that would shock respectable and saintly mummies, but with a reality that showed the life of that sublimest of men had struck deep chords in his own heart. By the time he had finished his sketch of St. Paul's attitude his own was transformed, and he was in that mood which priests and poets of many ages have experienced, and which yet never fails to catch men as in a flame whirlwind. Then he came to the "good fight," and laid bare with terrible exactness the lives of those who fought on the side of the bad. His idea of "faith" was in that defective condition, which regards it as consisting of loving and imitating the Founder of Christianity. His sketch of the crown of life was sometimes very mundane and material, but it told no less in his burning words, and if it had, it would not have been a defect of his, because Christians of every age have expressed their dissatisfaction with "the Incarnation," by preaching a Deity that was a bundle of human passions—very powerful but slightly irregular.

When John appealed to the ennobling and consoling fact, that a fadeless crown awaited the victor, he drew tears from many eyes and dwelt on a secret that had supported him through thick darkness, and for some moments the preacher seemed wrapped in an inspiration very similar to that which the Count had felt as he walked to chapel.

A prayer meeting followed, but as the Count thought it was for the initiated only, he did not remain.

After this service the Count's musings were probably more copious than interesting, at least for ordinary mortals who regard Sunday as a divine institution for over-feeding and painful idleness. So we leave his visions and his castles in that transparent region, where they are at least harmless, for they are far out of reach.

John's home had changed. A new peace had banished its spectres and care had put its gridiron in the cupboard and gone to take a short holiday. The Count felt the change. The excessive tension which had become so manifest in this cottage had pained him, but now the sweet life of plain, contented people, who loved each other deeply, was the fairest picture he had yet witnessed in the world. John loved his children as only a poor man, who lives with them hourly, can. It may be vulgar and merely animal, but nevertheless it forms a singular charm of peasant life. And when the Count saw the

tired man seek that respite from the burden of existence amongst his children—which a man must seek somewhere—the scene of domestic innocence and peace fascinated him. In a wonderful manner he mingled with the family, for it had much to teach him in addition to the delight it afforded. He realized so vividly what he had seen somewhere before, that true peasant life was the wellspring of a nation's health. Often did he bow his head in silent reverence when little Mary had climbed upon John's knee to try to learn "Gentle Jesus," before she went to bed.

Then he would have long talks with John about the people of Brington, amongst other topics. But John knew no politics; he was in no sense a citizen, except that he paid a poor-rate, and he did not criticize his superiors. The man who was both squire and magistrate was to him the most awful embodiment of dignity that mortal sight could behold. He regarded the vicar as a being of a different order from himself, pretty much as he regarded a fixed-star, *i.e.*, without censure or praise. He said that the vicar had baptized him and taken him to be confirmed, and he did not think that either did him much harm, except that when they came home in the waggon from the confirmation, he and another boy fought and he fell over the side of the waggon and cut his head, where the scar was still to be seen. He thought it was a funny way to

teach religion, but he supposed that though the vicar knew better, he must do it because he was paid for it.

The days rolled on, and the September sunshine seemed to throw waves of languishing melancholy on the bare fields.

The Count had got to know the schoolmaster and formed a high opinion of him. He was a man who knew his work and did it. Perhaps some of his sentiments might have been more elevated and less real, if instead of having to collect weekly pence for a living he had found himself in that station of life where one draws cheques for charitable institutions out of sheer *ennui*. I cannot say he was angelic, for they are reported to work for *nothing;* but he received such small pay and did so much that he must be classified somewhere up in that superhuman direction. For beside attempting the ordinary task of putting the knowledge and culture of ten generations into the fairly thick head of a lad before he was twelve, he was *permitted* by the vicar to be secretary to a club or two and keep the parish accounts, and take up anything that was lying about in a general, unpaid sort of way. But he did not complain. He rather thought the vicar a good fellow because he had no Sunday School, and that was a mercy after his last post, where he taught twice a day and trained the choir.

The Count succeeded in securing some help for

little Johnny, and left the case in the schoolmaster's hands, after he had furnished Johnny with a library not quite so large, but nearly as useful, as the Bodleian.

The Count also formed other acquaintances in Brington, who were filled with wonderful admiration for Mr. Greenwood, as they called him. The old women of Brington had a feast of young earthquakes served up warm. For they were never at a loss to say something new about a being who could live most of a month without working, and who could afford to give away half-crowns. These ancient ladies knew all about Mr. Greenwood—his origin and end—his father and mother—what he had been doing up to that time, and what he would do for all the rest of time. The universal and total absence of reason found in these ancient dames in every rank of life and in every part of the world is an indisputable proof that man spent countless generations in an animal condition before he acquired the use of reason.

These feminine oracles wondered what the Count could find in the bare solitude of the woods, where he was reported to ramble for a whole day, but as he had once been discovered in a pensive frame of mind and almost oblivious to any outer world, it was thought he might be guilty of some great crime —perhaps murder.

John Hurstley still thinks Mr. Greenwood was sent

by providence in answer to prayer. And he may be right.

The day had come when the Count had to pack up and label his small quantity of luggage, for to-morrow he was to depart. He visited the old hall and the woods with the feelings of a devotee, and sat there some hours and pondered.

He returned to find John busy in his garden. John could smile, for he had vast sums in the Bank of Hope at present. John was out of debt, and there were two pigs in the stye; and John felt he would be bright and trustful for ever, even under the darkest clouds.

The gooseberry-bushes looked rather forlorn, and the potatoe-tops seemed ashamed of themselves; at any rate they were changing colour. The apples hung and ripened, like a silent life. Everywhere nature was abating her force, for that immortal old woman, like all the rest, must take her siesta or stop altogether.

The Count was sad, but still he thought the visit had not been in vain for his own development.

Next morning he had to rise early to catch the first train at Blamford for London. The children were all up and clung around him with a tenderness he had never experienced. Sarah and Ellen were more subdued, but filled with deeper emotions. John attended him out of the village, and they

parted with feelings of sincere esteem and regard on both sides.

Before the Count reached Blamford, the bright sun broke forth, and the early light was one of enchantment. Bands of workers were going to the fields, and their light-hearted laughter sunk into his heart, embalmed with the breath of dawn.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AFTER much doubt on the subject, he resolved to return to Oxford, though he scarcely knew why. Oxford is useful to a man who wishes to pass examinations or spend a fortune, but as the Count wished for neither, it scarcely seemed serviceable to him. But it furnished an ostensible reason for his being out of the way of Mrs. Bam, who was far too busy amassing money, controlling societies, and inventing religions adulterated to the taste, to spend time over a boy who was dazed with a notion that men would sometime earnestly attend to that piece of antiquated rubbish called "a new commandment."

So he returned to Oxford in October, not without musings on the changed conditions since last year.

The Rev. Steady Swig had spent his "Long" as usual in Norway, enduring every form of discomfort, and calling it pleasure. He had returned with a rich store of photographs and browner face than that which he took away. These were the visible changes, the invisible were fewer.

When the Count called, the photographs, the hotels, the rivers, &c., &c., were happy supplies of conversation. When these were exhausted it occurred to Swig that possibly the Count had

been somewhere, and that he had photographs or something to show, so he inquired—

"Did you stay long in town, Count?"

"I scarcely went anywhere else," he replied.

Swig looked at him with that mixture of astonishment and pity, which a real Oxford man gives to anybody who *can* stay three weeks in the same place in England, and further asked—

"You must have found it awfully dull?"

"I can't say it was. I was reading."

"What! some more of those unaccountable books which frightened the Doctor into believing you were a Nihilist? I don't believe the old lady (I mean his wife) slept a wink till daylight every night for a week, especially after some mysterious disappearance or other, I heard of, when you ought to have been taking ices."

"I must apologize for that next time I see her. But you know this Nihilist notion of the Doctor's is so absurb that it amounts to an original invention on his part. I suppose he never reads anything except mathematics?"

"No. Unless it be the service in church occasionally in the vacation. All the rest of his information comes through curtain lectures."

"Poor man! If the curtains are fairly thick, I should think the information must be fairly wasted."

"Well, you see, you talked such abandoned Communism to him, and there is so much dynamite

about, that with his mathematical method of connecting things, I am not surprised that he should think you a Nihilist; but, I must confess, it does seem a little rough on you to say so to people."

"I suppose I must now consider myself in the light of a political adventurer or a political refugee; but perhaps I may live to undeceive them on this point," he added, somewhat amused, somewhat grave.

"Well, you have said nothing of your reading. Has it been historico-politico-theosophy, or what?"

"It has been theology."

A peel of brown seemed to shell off Mr. Swig's face, as if he must "pale in these ineffectual fires." Or perhaps he thought of the yelling tumult which interrupted their last conference, and he said—

"It would be a very shallow statement to say I hope you liked it, for I suppose *that is* impossible. But did you find anything in it?"

"Yes; many things curious—some quite interesting. I think if this nation is wise enough to hold together for a few hundred years more, that possibly the history of its religious wars will be understood and certainly appreciated. They seem to have devised a hell out of the capacious gloom of their own imaginations, and set themselves to realize it on earth. However, I suppose these were phases of the phenomenal, and one can only hope history won't repeat itself. I still hold to my view of life

and religion, and I have determined to take orders, and to test those views in actual contact with men."

The astonished Swig could only ask—

"Have you fixed upon any parish?"

"Not yet. I thought you might be able to help me. I should like a rough, poor parish. Perhaps it had better be in the north."

"I believe you can find one poor and rough enough in Oxford, so I am told. I never did any parish work, you know. Would you like to have a 'title' here, and go on with your reading? In fact, it might almost be worth taking a degree, if you are going into orders."

"I think it might be worth it, and I should decidedly prefer being here a year or two, under those circumstances, if I could find a parish."

"Oh, that would be easy enough. The only question is, would the Bishop accept you? Let us see, you are old enough?"

"Yes."

"I will write to the Bishop, if you like. I can't say I know him, in any true sense. You see, in the University the Bishop is nothing. In fact, I am afraid we rather think Bishops small fry, in Oxford. But I will write with pleasure."

The Count heard some of those remarks with wonder, almost with pain; expressed his thanks, if the tutor would take so much trouble, then departed.

The Rev. Steady Swig, in course of time, wrote as follows:—

WOODENSPOON, OXON.

MY LORD,—I venture to trouble your Lordship on behalf of a case that interests me, and in which I need advice and direction, which your Lordship can most effectually give. We have a German Count here who is a year or two older than most students who come up, and many years more intelligent and earnest. He wishes to take holy orders. He has been with us a year. I advised him not to take a degree as it would not add to his position, but now perhaps it would be better if he did take a degree, which he can easily do; but he is anxious not to lose two years. The plain question, therefore, is, will your Lordship admit him as a candidate for ordination, and allow him to present himself at the next examination? He has read a great deal more theology than the ordinary candidates for ordination, and I have not met with anyone so earnest on religion during the last twenty years.

If your Lordship can accept him, and would name a day, the Count would call upon your Lordship.

I must apologize for troubling your Lordship with this, but I am not equal to advising the man, and your Lordship can so easily do so.

I am, my Lord,

Your obedient servant,

S. SWIG.

CHAPTER XL.

THE COUNT felt that a parish in Oxford would for many reasons be preferable, but realized that there were other difficulties than his Lordship's consent, which he did not doubt would readily be given.

Religion in Oxford is sold in parcels like patent medicine, and you must take it with the label on or not at all, the name of the label being High, Low, or Broad. Unfortunately the Count had seen the worst side of extreme subjective religion. He knew their ejaculations, their sighs, and their groans, and he knew also their selfishness and their cheating. He admired a liberal, moderate position, but he felt that a broad *party* was a misnomer. Though he esteemed the earnest self-sacrifice of many who had been roused by the High Church movement, it shocked every idea of self-sacrifice and outraged every notion of common-sense, that men in earnest on eternal questions should turn and rend each other about a contortion of the body or a coloured bit of tapestry, which looked like a patch of the dark ages gradually fading into light, as if the everlasting hills of truth were but a vast pile of genuflecting sandbags.

He despised the patent and the label, and allowing individual character to outweigh all other considerations, he obtained an introduction to an earnest parish priest, who saw as large a side of truth at once as any of his compeers; for him he offered to do Sunday-school work, or work of any type that would let him see the Oxford citizen as far removed from the University as possible.

He found many surprises in Oxford citizen life. Some that were grotesque pieces of antiquity, arising from the double-headed government of a small city under the control of a Vice-Chancellor and a Mayor, both of them chosen by accident or by faction. This duality of University *versus* City leads to that mutual harmony which anybody ourside of Oxford would expect. The University thinks that the city is to be treated as a dog without a pedigree, and so lash the cur with the whip of scorn. The cur thinks it has certain privileges (hanging on to the heels of said Pomposity terrier-wise, for instance), which privileges cur snarls and bites for.

This arrangement produces the striking marvels of ordinary married life. On state occasions 'Varsity and City—as even man and wife may—hide their deformity with a network of tape of traditional red hue, and any royal or noble visitor is struck with the development that human nature has reached under such favourable circumstances. It looks like a representation of altruism in gilt ginger-

bread. But as human life is not always on state view, there are times when that respectable person, the skeleton in the cupboard, comes out, in that highly phosphorescent condition which seems to be his native attire.

The Count, as a resident with these two old married people, saw the skeleton rather frequently, and at first was inclined to look at it seriously as a matter for tears; but his objection to that feminine liquid being strong, he gave way to banter and laughter.

Oxford is one of those ancient corporations where a majority of its councillors are, by a very old charter, elected from born fools, and its aldermanic body is unique. The Count was probably suffering somewhat from maternal influence, and paying the penalty each man must pay, for being set up with a ready-made soul, as his stock-in-trade at the beginning of life, when he wrote a small tract "To the Oxford Fool, *alias* Voter," showing that he paid for gas, which was a form of darkness rendered disagreeable; that he invested money as a water-rate in a slimy, brackish substance, containing most of the properties of charity soup in their native state, &c., &c.; but he called especial attention to the Oxford Lame Boojum (which mysterious Oxford Lame Boojum was always tearing up drains and cutting through streets, as if in search for the money it had thrown away last year), whose special function was

to sweep mud into heaps and leave it there for carts to scatter on the good-natured fool, *alias* ratepayer. This Lame Boojum he sketched as a rotund, plump person of the female persuasion, who did nothing herself, but managed her estate by means of a Scotchman or two, who carefully saved her a shilling, provided she gave them a pound for doing so.

But as the old Boojum was blind and deaf, as well as lame, the tract had the usual result of that species of literature, viz., it relieved the author and benefited the printer's devil.

By a natural reaction he next looked at the matter gravely, and felt that he might possibly prevent the darker lines of the female face on a Sunday, if he could entertain the Lord of creation on Saturday night, otherwise than by gauging himself with XX or XXX or any other number of X which is supposed to Xcel all the other letters in its rapidly brutalizing one part of the population and in enriching, *i.e.*, ennobling, the other part.

He therefore devised entertainments of a novel kind for these vacant Saturday evenings, but as the parish afforded no place large enough, he must secure the Town Hall, and in order to do this it was necessary to interview the old married couple above, *i.e.*, Vice-Chancellor and Mayor.

He first called upon the "He" (I speak relatively, strictly in light or darkness of the above figure).

Now this worthy He did not forget the face,

form, tongue and remarks, &c., of the Count. So he received him with the frost-biting formality of the she-head of a she-boarding school.

The Count stated his object, and requested that gentleman's permission to do something to entertain and elevate the masses of his brethren.

Now the He changed again and became the astonished He, and remarked that the populace ought to be educated, but that was quite a different matter from "entertaining or elevating" them—the things in fact had no connection. Plato nowhere said that the people ought to be entertained and elevated, Aristotle had not ventured to suggest it—and he himself? why he had never said a word about it. No, it could not be right. Then with some delicate suggestions that a boy, who was or ought to be seeking his own education, might well leave abstruse matters of state and religion to older and barer heads, the He waited stoically for an opening —in the wall.

The Count departed with some profound convictions.

But as he was out and the He had proved interesting from a snappish point of view, he thought he might venture to call upon the She (see reference to metaphor above).

The She received him with a deal of smile and much white waistcoat, as She said—

"By an open countenance and an open vest, I get

people to invest." (Hereupon observe great enlargement of smile.)

The Count stated his object to the Worshipful the Mayor.

She replied with merry laughter and eyes that twinkled with the light of the Will-o'-the-Wisp—

"I am so busy at present liquidating the building society that I have to abstain from smaller philanthropic services to the city. Besides I am a J.P., and really these movements to improve the people, if they go on, would blot out the race of J.P.s. I hope you quite understand, me, sir. I am a friend to the 'Varsity, but in my official capacity I am bound to assert the privileges of the city," and then with the smiles and sugar of lead, which a successful conjuror showers on the visitor he hopes to see again, he bowed the Count out.

The Count left with more profound convictions.

CHAPTER XLI.

THAT same evening as the Count was leaving chapel, his tutor said—

"I have news for you, if you can look in to-night."

After hall the Count called and found the Rev. Steady Swig somewhat moved, and somewhat jocose. He said—

"Pray be seated. I have news from his Lordship. The letter is an interesting specimen of ecclesiastical literature, but you shall hear it:—

"MY DEAR MR. SWIG,

Your letter needs no apology. Such cases must always have my best sympathy. The difficulty which presents itself is this—that there are no special grounds in this gentleman's case on which I can waive the rules for admission of candidates to Holy Orders. Those rules require before ordination a man shall have taken a degree and shall have attended at least two courses of divinity lectures, or have studied at a Theological College. These conditions are found to be necessary in the case of our own countrymen. I cannot think them less necessary in the case of a foreigner, who has not been instructed in the principles of our Church.

"The attempt to combine academical study with the preparation for ordination is very apt to spoil both. Attendance at divinity lectures or at some equivalent course of theological instruction, I do not in any case dispense with.

"I am afraid my reply will look like discouragement to your student.

"It really is not meant to wear that aspect. I should gladly learn that he had resolved—as many another has done—to go through his University course, take his degree, and in due time apply for admission into the ministry."

"Now," continued Swig, "when I read it, I said Amen! Pray for the soul of red tape! It is a singular thing that a mitre should act on all human beings, as if they were embalmed, and that there is always a decided set in mummy-ward, for which no antidote has yet been discovered."

"I hope it is not quite so bad as that," said the Count. "What are these divinity lectures his Lordship insists upon?"

"They are a course of lectures given by three or four different professors, some of whom lecture twelve times a turn, some eighteen. Each professor's set counts as one course, and at the end of that course you receive a written certificate of attendance. I never heard of any man who learnt a single thing at them, or even who tried to. You better look in at one and you will then realize what

a festive mood his Lordship was in when he wrote that letter. You will see one man reading a novel, another carefully annotating a science book, a third taking elaborate notes which turns out to be a pen-and-ink sketch for Shrimpton's window. And I heard that last term when dear old Dribblett stopped to take a drink, a voice was heard in the far distance, 'What's trumps?'"

"But that could not be true, surely?"

"I won't say it *could not*, for I have seen all the rest myself.

And these are the wonderful lectures that nearly every Bishop on the bench insists upon, as if they represented at least a month's reading, whereas they do not require a single hour's intelligent attention. I lose my patience with them. Some Bishops are Oxford men, and it has been known to occur, even in that petrified stage of human life, that a man could so far remember actual experience, as to know what took place when he was an ordinary factor of the world, yet any man without his two certificates would rouse pretty nearly the same attitude, as if he were an avowed atheist. To my mind they furnish the strongest proof that the Church is Divine, for no human organization could exist a single generation with such managers at the head of it."

The Count was so surprised at this form of Divine government, and the Christian way in which Swig received the letter and spoke of his spiritual superior,

that he sat in silence; when the tutor at length asked—

"What do you intend to do now? This door is closed and all the powers of heaven could not prevail against it."

"I shall seek a parish in the north of England. Meantime I will attend some of these lectures if I am not too late, and then perhaps some other Bishop will accept me."

"You are in plenty of time. They are the last to begin and the first to leave off," said Swig, with a leering grin, that some people would say was like a priest, but which some people would say was *not.*

The Count then selected which lectures he would take. And agreeing that they were to look out for something in the rough North, the Count departed.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE proceedings of that day seemed to the Count full of the saddest, inscrutable mystery. And it might be taken as a type of the century through which we are passing. He had come in contact with three distinct guardians of three forces, which form the cable that must anchor the world, *i.e.*, civic authority, culture, religion, all joined to produce and defend what we, in our ignorance, call morals. Each guardian had driven him from that particular door—had in fact knocked him down, and left him to drift into what adjustment with morals and misery he might light upon. And what was even worse, perchance each was eager to do right, and behind that, which seemed to him blind, or mechanical, or indifferent, there was an earnest struggle to do the best that was in them. They were regarded by their fellow men as superior, in some respect, or why did they hold offices which few could ever aspire to? If then these had trampled on the first flush of moral earnestness, which sought only advantage for others, what could the young heart hope to achieve amongst that countless mob, respecting whom authority, culture, and religion merely agreed that they were swine.

But darkest of all there staggered, in some dull manner, this thought, that in the order of man's limited and benighted existence, all three functionaries might be necessary,—had in fact not merely done their best, but done only what could be done.

Then he felt the sirocco-wave of three fiery furnaces blowing over every noble enthusiasm and leaving the charred remains which prudence calls—duty.

There are moments when one feels life to be in vain, when its vast emptiness echoes with derisive laughter, and existence seems an ill-shapen spectre, and a man's best actions float on the recollection like miasmata, poisoning every flower of the present and every bud of the future. Such were these moments to the Count. He seemed to have touched the barriers of outer darkness.

For many hours he sat baffled, overwhelmed. The scenes of his life reappeared. His early childhood in the old mansion, that still bore many marks of power and triumph—the dim and vague foreshadowing that he was born to be a king—the aged Monarch whose proud grandeur, even in its decay, awed insolence into fealty—then the mysterious disappearance of power which forced him to leave that life, to wake up in the heart of a fevered city—the shiver of desolation which he so often felt as he walked in that crowded and mad metropolis—his slowly awakening to find that this tumult and struggle

were not life but the agony of death-fever—the Monarch's death—the life that arose in darkness, becoming clearer and clearer till its loveliness fascinated him, all this and more flooded him, as now he sat with his idol broken into fragments.

What wonder if he longed to throw down his false name—to give up the struggle against forms of civilization and religion that profit only the lucky few, and tell all men that he himself was *the last Devil*, and leave them to wallow in *their* selfishness, because he felt that they were a little lower than the angels, who used to carry his father's messages over the world? But such a plan was not possible. The family mansion and its Monarch had perished. His father's name had found immortality, as an emphatic interrogative particle, in this northern climate, and he himself was yoked in the trammels of nineteenth century civilization.

The chilly dawn broke, whilst he was yet struggling and groping for a future. Doubtless he might achieve success. Let him live as others lived, and the brilliant positions that are open to well-trained genius and well-invested wealth were open to him. He might live in luxury and die respected. But—but a chill breath of the morning pierced this thin guise of goodness and glory. He thought of the countless thousands who were rising to a day's slavery—of men who were sinking into lower brutality under this false existence—of women who were

blackening into avenging spectres under our luxurious indifference—of children who starved and cursed, whilst we gave our handsome donations to drive them into board-schools. All these knew law as they saw it in the bungling administration of the magistrate—they knew culture as they saw it in the genteel scorn of the scholar—they knew religion as they saw it in a triumphant hierarchy, therefore they cursed God and died. Should he then desert them and leave them in death, or join that band of martyrs who are sowing, in silence and darkness, the seeds of everlasting life?

The noble heart triumphed, and he devoted himself to death that he might find life.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO or three weeks had passed, during which the Count had done much practical work, and, amidst much disappointment, had met with some rays of encouragement. Amongst the destitute poor, he found cases of the highest fortitude and tender self-sacrifice he had yet witnessed. Some few old women, who were blighted and benumbed to every earthly pursuit and pleasure, seemed brightening daily into a truer life. His Sunday School class was a picture of bright harmony, and perhaps nowhere in Oxford could so many persons have been found together, who realized so fully the love that is redeeming the world.

The Count had never been confirmed, so his friend the vicar wished to present him, as a confirmation was about to be held in his church; and perhaps, out of consideration of what he thought due to the Count's position, he wrote to the Bishop, stating the case of the distinguished person who was to be presented. The Bishop manifested a keen interest in this novel event, and asked many questions of the vicar, from whom he had the satisfaction of learning that the Count was going to take orders, that he was already a most efficient helper in his own parish.

So his Lordship expressed the desire for an interview previous to the *imposing* ceremony of imposition.

The Count was therefore presented in the vestry. His Lordship received him with an easy affability, that almost amounted to fatherly kindness, and set forth to the Count the pleasurable emotions which this interview evoked. The Count bowed with the benign hauteur of a prince. Lofty dignity and sincere religion seemed to have kissed each other. Then his Lordship asked, "Why did you not seek a title in my diocese? It would have given me great pleasure to ordain you, and you could have continued your good work in this parish."

The Count turned a face to his Lordship that seemed to be settling down into an eternal interrogative. Apparently foreign counts were cattle that were commonly seeking to enter his Lordship's fold, for he saw no anomaly in his question, he saw no burning inquiry in the Count's face, but merely added, "I hope you will call and see me if you are ever passing. I shall be so very pleased to see you."

The Count thanked him and bowed, and departed with feelings not quite so mechanically smooth as his Lordship's.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE COUNT had seen Mrs. Filledful, and had apologized for his hasty disappearance, as if by means of dynamite. As he had made three unsuccessful attempts to do so, within a week of said disappearance, the august dame received it with the gracious condescension of a police-constable, when noting the explanation of a ticket-of-leave man. So once again he had been invited to witness the social organ of the double F. He went, intending to show heroic powers of endurance, if there should be an opening.

When he arrived he found the usual amount of shirt-front, labouring under the old delusion that the walls might come down if they did not prop them up—there was the old and feeble imitation of a barrel-organ plus the side remarks of the populace, conducted by an eminent pianist, and the guests—our antique friend anatomy was still there, doing her best to look killing from breast to back-bone.

It seemed like a photograph of the former assembly and yet it was nearly entirely new. The Doctor was not present. He was supposed to be engaged on an original research with reference to the relation between mathematics and morals. He had got the

idea from the mathematical accuracy with which the Jewish Sabbath and other great festivals recurred, and he felt that somewhere in that lofty region of pure law, for which the highest mathematics are but clumsy scaffolding, absolute accuracy and absolute morality sloped away into absolute beauty. Dear old creature, let him work in peace!

The distinguished foreigner had taken his illustrious liver and gone.

Aramantha had become engaged, and sparkled in the light of delusive hope like an actress in false jewellery. Her future puppet, banker and slave (these are the three stages through which a husband passes, put in their chronological order) was Lord Ringfinger, who was dangling about the chair of Mrs. double F, whilst she wore the set smile of a waning moon which had its origin from this rising sun (son).

But the new element consisted mainly of "freshmen," whose invisible green relieved the ancient darkness of the old dowagers, who had shown so much of themselves, in all the best drawing-rooms of the last half century, that they looked like the pillars of society in open sacks, just going to be tied up and thrown into the River Lethe. But amongst these bony, bare origins of society, there were other anatomies, who seemed to be trying in vain to combine the classic timidity of the fawn with a first-class certificate in Juvenal and physiology. They

were the daughters of a professor, who had bred them as specimens of the first person singular feminine of the future tense.

The Count was grinned at, or nodded at, or butted at, or shaken but not taken, according to the different distances of space and friendship.

He finally came to anchor between John Drawler and Steady Swig. In course of the evening he told the tutor of the almost paternal reception he had received from the Bishop. Swig sniffed as if he contemplated setting up as a snuff-tester or a fox-hound. Then diving both hands to the bottom of his pockets, he said, "Now what does the old Jesuit mean! I wish you would enclose his own letter to him. I wonder on which occasion he was sober."

"Are you bad?" said Drawler, who only very dimly comprehended the situation. "You look as piously horrified as if you had invented a new religion."

"Ah, *you* are an Agnostic," replied Swig, "and this is a *Divine* mystery, which you must never hope to penetrate. Did you ever hear of that rare commodity called episcopal autocracy mixed with human inconsistency?"

"Not much, but my father was an archdeacon, and I have occasionally heard him fill up certain blanks in his experience by calling his spiritual superior a liar."

"But please, Drawler, you must say 'highly

inconsistent' in this drawing-room, and not use strong language. No wonder you are such an infidel, brought up like that."

Drawler smiled serenely, as if the past was all right, and the future not there at all. And this Christian assembly listened to heathen music, mumbled empty nothings, and smiled empty deceits, shuffled to the "bar," and lounged back, with faces that seemed full of profound regret that time was ever invented.

At parting Drawler asked the Count to dine with him before term ended, and the Count accepted, because he hoped to get to know a little more of that inner brotherhood to which John belonged.

CHAPTER XLV.

WE must now take our leave of the Count von Schwärzbüchse und Flaschenbürste. This name had been a vast weight upon him for some months; no one could pronounce it; no one could remember it; no one could spell it. He had nearly suffered as much from it as a lady of fashion suffers from her dressmaker. It so Germanized all his utterances that even educated persons mistook his clear English for a Teutonic mystery; therefore he determined to change his name into something plain, simple, Saxon, and disown the Count altogether, for though that respectable person might do very well on the stage, he felt that, in the shape of a curate, he would be as much out of place as mirth at a marriage.

See, then, the Von Flaschenbürste start life again as Mr. William Wood. It is singular that people will bear the intolerable burden of a horrid name, when they might change it all, by writing it upon their door-post, or in a copy-book, for that matter. Mr. William Wood seemed to breathe more freely in the November fog than the late Count, and he felt such a young John Bull, that he would hardly

have been surprised at a pair of horns instead of the one that used to be in the family.

Mr. Wood meantime, by the aid of his friend, the Vicar, had found a parish in a northern diocese. The parish was poor and rough, consisting mainly of colliers. The Lord Bishop had accepted his application, and handed him over to the tormentors —his chaplains and secretary.

I don't know whether these two particular chaplains—the Rev. De Smartin Packthread and the Rev. Lorenzo Charles Wadbox — had more of prussic acid in their composition than their brethren in the wide world, but they were, in the opinion of two unknown men, not stars in that northern hemisphere, but the Northern Lights, rendered approachable only by broad cloth and red tape.

Mr. Wood's paper had yielded some amusement to these two luminaries; for though he had altered his own name, he could not change the venerable name of his birth-place, and Blackingbox they had never heard of. They each consulted "The Chaplain's 'Vade-Mecum,'" a small book they always use when they set their examination papers, but in no geographical position could this wonderful place be found. One of them thought it was a county in Wales, and the other felt sure he had passed through it on a walking tour in the north of Scotland. But as he had been in the world a long time before he

was baptized, they almost agreed that the latter place was right. Then, in giving a sketch of his opinions on some cardinal points, they met with an expression here and there that was new and a little troublesome to chaplain-intellect; and as Mr. Packthread had always been taught that everything his mind could not grasp was "Scotch metaphysics," he felt sure he had got some of that mouldy diet here, and this settled the place of Mr. Wood's birth.

They reported to his Lordship that the paper was right enough, but there was no mention of sin in Mr. Wood's answers, and they went on to ask, "What is the use of a man in your Lordship's diocese who has not very clear notions of sin? He ought to be able to paint its every hue, from the blush of a barmaid to the apostacy of a—Dean."

This sentence was a joint-stock affair, and had been made with the mechanical exactitude that only an ecclesiastical official can command or conceive. For the benefit of young authors, I may indicate how it acquired its salient points. They had written *our* diocese, but this seemed so much like "ego et meus rex," that they thought they had better remind a man and a brother, that he was a lord and a bishop, by way of doing penance for their rebellious egotism.

They selected "blush of a barmaid" because they both agreed that it sounded literary, and as they had never seen that phenomenon, they also agreed

it must be the palest shade of depravity, and not visible to the naked eye.

Apostacy was Packthread's word; he liked it; it was associated in his mind with Julian, the apostate; it sounded magnificent; he felt a bigger and better man whenever he used it, as if he were roasting that illustrious heathen in the patent kitchen range of Packthread.

The last word troubled them much. Dear young author, it is an awful responsibility to have to finish a sentence!

They first of all wrote bishop, but it seemed personal. They then thought of archdeacon, as being a good-sounding word; but Wadbox was going to propose to the archdeacon's daughter. Packthread declared that to finish a sentence with a word of one syllable "would damn every chance of promotion in the Church," and, in support of this theory, he made many references to antiquated books on Latin composition. But they both owed the dean a grudge, and at length their hatred for the living triumphed over their love of the literary.

The Rev. De Smartin Packthread and the Rev. Lorenzo Charles Wadbox, having done their duty to the unknown culprit, Mr. W. Wood, went back to the cure of souls, and turned a few tunes on the ecclesiastical organ about brotherly love.

Whilst they had been enjoying their official repast his Lordship's secretary had hung with beak and

talons on the defenceless head of Mr. Wood. This secretary was an ancient person, called Tickler Wiggem Twisterley, Esq. He lived in London, and therefore felt a lively contempt for all men who did not. He had never been to a university, and took especial interest in battering those who had. As it was known that he was a tickler and a twister, many bishops solicited the favour of being allowed to advertise that he was their secretary. Twisterly expanded in importance till the girth of his greatness would have formed the readiest measure of the circumference of the globe. For six days in the week the clerks in his presence quaked internally, and on Sunday, when the preacher drew a forcible description of a red-faced, irate Deity, sending cholera, the poor clerk thought of Twisterly, and would have liked to wish that there was not a future life.

No man ever had sent Twisterley the formal answers to his printed questions without the Twister returning them for some slight correction or emendation.

When he received Mr. Wood's paper, he scowled because it was not an aristocratic name, and when he read further he scowled twice because it was; for the certificate of baptism contained the German Count. Old Twisterley gazed on the document with the inexpressible scorn of a female committee, and then returned it with emphatic note:—

"Dear Sir,—This certificate is not a legal document."

Mr. Wood regarded this as a singular proceeding, and wrote back to inquire whether he should be baptized again, or write to the bishop that he could not seek orders, owing to this unfortunate circumstance.

Tickler Wiggem Twisterley, Esq., was afflicted with hot emotions on the receipt of this reply. He scowled, and danced, and swore, at one and the same moment. The fact was, he was in a dilemma, and the pious simoon which heaved his breast would have blighted dissent and German students for ever if it could have escaped; for he regarded these two classes of people as the vermin which had put him into this humiliating condition.

The office boy wrote to Mr. Wood, saying that Mr. Twisterley had referred the matter to his Lordship, and he (Mr. Wood) need not trouble further on that matter.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE night had come for Mr. Wood to dine with John Drawler at All Bones College. There was a large party to-night, for, with the addition of guests, they amounted to eight persons, who sat down in the grandeur and luxury of the ancient dining-hall. It was not unusual for two or three to sit down, and I have sat down by myself, when I felt a second Robinson Crusoe, and expected to see some bare men trot off at a brisk pace with the dish covers.

John Drawler's party consisted of two others, besides himself and Mr. Wood. One was a clergyman, who had come up to Oxford from his country living, on which he had not entered many months, and looked like a good all-round man, who had stayed long enough at Oxford to acquire the external dimensions which used to be indicated by the phrase "port-wine rector." This was Henry Carver.

The fourth was a younger man, with a bushy beard and a husky voice, as if it had grown rough with croaking over the follies of men. He was a reverend, though no one ever suspected him of that weakness when he was out of his stall in his college

chapel, and even when there, it required some imagination to attach the epithet to his behaviour. He belonged to "the young Oxford party," which is a fragmentary and disjointed association for the preservation of philosophy *without* a name, having noticed that philosophy with a name always becomes obsolete. The Rev. Jingle Gritts was a champion of this disjointed association, and laboured day and night to represent himself on committees, on boards of faculties, and boards with no faculties, unless wood is a faculty, until people should think that the reins of the universe were in the hands of Jingle Gritts.

These four worthies took up spoons and introduced mock turtle, which must have felt wonderfully at home with most of them.

A few broken remarks were scattered at solemn intervals about politics, the flood, probability of a mild winter, still greater probability of the return of the glacial period, reference to the death of the celebrated W——, logical proof from Gritts that he was not celebrated, could not be, for he believed in the devil, and used such words as eternity when he was excited.

One plate supplanted another at rythmical intervals, and the clash and the rattle seemed the attendant blare of a new dynasty, only it ought to have been spelled with an I.

Then spake Gritts: "Carver, I have not seen you

since you went to your parish. How have you left those few sheep?"

"The sheep have an inclination to nibble, and strongly wish to invert the true order of Nature, for they would fleece me, whereas it is my duty to fleece them, or I shall be a bad shepherd. Mine is an old-fashioned little country town, where everybody knows everybody else a little better than he knows himself. I had to make a few improvements at the vicarage, and really the plans and the estimates of the tradesmen bordered on the sublime; they evidently took me for the gilt man on a stick, and thought I had gone down there with the sole intention of illuminating one passage of the Bible only."

"What interesting passage might that be, Carver? I scarcely gave you credit for illuminating even one."

"As far as this particular passage goes you are right, for I refused to illuminate it. They seemed interested in the pleasing narrative about the rich fool."

This piece of divinity gave great satisfaction, and John Drawler quitely remarked, "What theological insight, for sheep."

Then Carver, with a merry twinkle, proceeded: "What congregations we had at first! Such an array of shop-keepers, shoe-makers, and tailors, that they must have thought I was an army contractor.

Both the doctors in the place suddenly discovered that if other people had bodies, they, at least, had souls. The three lawyers developed a wondrous taste for the Gospel. One of the churchwardens came to me in his normal condition of drunkenness, and suggested that we should enlarge the Church. The laundress frightened my wife by telling her she thought I must be Anti-Christ, because I got such large congregations, but she said it *would be hard* if the millennium came now, for at last she had got some good work. I gave a few orders to some tradesmen who did not come to Church, and sent for a young surgeon, who had not been in the place three weeks longer than myself, to attend one of the servants, and I let it out that my solicitor lived in London.

Next Sunday the army of locusts had disappeared, and there was a good old-fashioned ring about the Church, as the sermon almost seemed to repeat itself."

This made a powerful impression on Mr. Wood, and as he was always thinking there were forms of English life which were unknown to him, he asked,

"But what do you really think of the people?"

"I think they are"—and here the new vicar glanced around to see how many waiters were within hearing—"devils. My predecessor was a Calvinist, and the fruit of his teaching is, that the beggars say they are predestined to do evil, and they have no more moral sense than a besom."

Jingle Gritts observed, "I suppose you will get a curate and come back here pretty often. It would be a wholesome arrangement, for here you could live in the light of the latest discovery, and if you became dazed—as you might, you know, Carver—you could retire to provincial darkness till your sight grew stronger."

"Thank you," he replied, with a dive at Gritts, "I have had quite enough of teaching what I don't believe, and examining in what I don't know, for the rest of my natural life, or artificial either. I am quite willing to let you have my share of the dazzling light of this learned seat. I have a fair amount of glebe land, and I can grow roses and do a bit of farming, and if I can teach them to be industrious and pay their debts, and let the millennium alone, I shall have done something."

With this material view of spiritual functions, they rose and withdrew to Drawler's rooms, Mr. Wood almost wondering whether Drawler had got up a small play for his amusement, considerably mistaking what would be amusing to *him*.

The being who could find fault with Drawler's room would either be an upholsterer by trade, or one who thought that John ought to go off into matrimony, and leave the room to him. As I belong to neither class, I will venture to remark that there was an ancient and stately grandeur, combined with modern comfort and refinement, such as might be

found in a ducal mansion, and such as can be found in every college in Oxford, and when you are walking round, it will be shown you for a very small fee. I state this frankly, that there may be no misunderstanding between us, and that we may at once listen to the laughter and the conversation of this quartett.

These small parties were Drawler's keenest delight, though one would have imagined, as he lounged in every careless attitude, that he was too satiated with the flowers of life to find anything in this limited world, which could still yield delight. But each party afforded John the opportunity of paying off old scores against all "she creatures," whom he regarded as serviceable in this world, only because they gave solid proof of the possibility of a better world—where there should be no more She. And as these parties were always composed of bachelors or those who wished they were, astonishing revelations were made of man's opinion of the "She"—revelations that would have depopulated half the drawing-rooms of Oxford.

They had scarcely lounged into the room, when they were followed by coffee, and Drawler produced his "batchelor weeds." Two packs of cards stood ready on a small table. Care and fog were alike shut out, and light and luxury reigned.

"I never can catch a lump of sugar," said Carver, as two knobs rolled one after the other on the floor,

instead of into his coffee, and he stood snapping the empty tongs.

"There is something wrong in your pedigree, Carver," remarked Jingle Gritts. "Some of them, at an early stage of evolution, neglected to practise the use of weapons, and you pay for their conservatism."

"I think you were the stump orator of evolution, the last time that I met you, Gritts; on that particular occasion, you evolved moonshine and morals—stars and stilts—sound, and I wish I could add, sense, for then you would have evolved everything. I think you began with duck-weed and watercresses that night. Do you go any farther back now?"

"Yes, ever so much farther back, but I had no intention of taking that long journey to-night, when I made the innocent reference to your forefathers. But now you have this important parish, you really ought to seek a little true light on great questions. I suppose *you* will teach them the playful fable about something being made out of nothing?"

"It does seem quite as good a fable, as that something made itself out of nothing."

"But we don't say that. Why should not matter be eternal?"

"It seems to me to make very little difference if it is. But I think last time you lumped all matter together and called it the phenomenal. Now suppose we set

you up in business with all matter, as eternal phenomena; what return will you give us for the capital?"

"Now," said Drawler, "you are going to tumble into the bottomless pit of metaphysics. Never mind the whole universe, a few suns and moons are only so many specks of dust on the beam of your scales, and may after all be optical illusions. Let us keep to our own world. We know that it is composed of matter, that it contains some intelligence, but that nearly everything is wrong, and that it is a gigantic blunder, with the singular faculty of continually repeating itself."

The two parsons were pleased to find that their host had struck against "gigantic blunder" so soon, though, of course, by doing it he shipwrecked their catechism. They both smiled, and Carver made some attempt to answer—

"You have admitted, Drawler, that there is some intelligence in this world, and though, Heaven knows, it seems to get less and less each year at Oxford, still the old question of Socrates remains, 'If there is some intelligence in us, is it not fair to infer that there is a good deal more somewhere else?' and this very soon lands us into the design argument, you know."

"Hang the design argument," said Gritts, "and as for intelligence, that used to be supposed to be a definite something—like the soul or whatever you call it, but now intelligence is found to be a mere

relation of particles. Certain molecules in you, arranged in a given form, are intelligent, but when they are differently arranged, say in a butterfly's wing or a sheep-trotter, they are not intelligent. This explains the whole group of consciousness, and thinking, and that lot, which lot I should like to pass on to old Socrates, with one of these cigars, and I think his life would acquire a new aroma." After a pause he proceeded—

"Now, Drawler, we will respect your wishes, and keep to this little patch of sandy desert, which you call our world, and which you rightly remark is not so well upholstered as it might be. I don't think anyone is to blame for that, and we shall probably get to the bottom of the secret some day; we have only just begun to apply the scientific method to the investigation of morals, and I expect to see the whole question on a new footing, and this is where evolution does help us. 'Wherever you get contractile muscular tissue, you have the capacity for a moral life,' said somebody, and he seems about right. We have acquired morals just the same as we have acquired the notion of possession. And it is our antiquated notion of morals that leads to our great discomfort in the present day. Men rebel against them, and we have not dared to examine them, because we applied the epithets of *right* and *wrong* to an article of our own manufacture."

"I always think you have evolved far enough,

Gritts," said Carver, "when you begin to mix right and wrong into that hasty-pudding of yours. It would be such a waste of time to begin the whole question over again."

"I don't wish to begin the whole question again. Let us take our morality like our clothes, from those who have preceded us, but let us remember that we make both."

"Then," asked Mr. Wood, "do you think Nature teaches us nothing?"

"Certainly. She teaches us wastefulness, cruelty, and wanton destruction. And men have been fairly quick at learning all three."

"But don't you feel that her real lesson is something far deeper than this? Does she not teach us the luxury of boundless giving, and, pointing to it, say, 'This is Life'? Does not the cruelty of which you complain arise from the selfishness of her offspring, not from her?"

"If you are going to lead us to Altruism, let me say of that novel invention that it is both unnatural and impossible. Nature says nothing against selfishness. She simply says of two hundred thousand beings, you can't all live, and the weakest goes to the wall. We use the word natural altogether incorrectly. A natural son is one who buries his father and mother alive, or leaves them to starve and die according to the morals of his nation. That is a slight degree removed from Altruism. Then again it is impossible. All these chimæras

have been tried about equality, and brotherhood, but in vain, and you will have to read about 'loving your neighbour as yourself' a few hundred thousand generations yet, and be satisfied with reading about it."

"I am sorry to deny your statements, but I must maintain that it is in a deeper sense both natural and possible. It is natural in the sense in which poetry and sublimity and beauty are natural. And to the evolutionist all things are possible."

"I don't see why."

"Surely if some animal, in some vague relationship to apes, clad in shaggy hair and growling and clutching food from the other animals in the wild forest, entered upon a career by which he denuded himself of his grisly garb and forgot to growl, till at length he reached such perfection that, clothed in a dress suit, he could smilingly help his guests to food *before* he thought of himself,—if this is true, I say, then the evolutionist must never use the word impossible, when applied to this animal."

"Quite right," said Carver, "but I don't see where your Altruism is to come from, nor what it will do when it does come."

"I thought it came from the Founder of Christianity."

"What, did *He* profess it?" asked Drawler.

"No. *He acted it*," replied Mr. Wood.

"This is theology," said Gritts: "we never talk theology. Shall we cut for partners?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THEY took the cards and cut. Drawler and Mr. Wood were partners, and Drawler remarked as they sat down: "It is a case of Church *versus* State."

For some time the game required their attention, because one was a complete stranger and each wished to gauge the skill of the rest.

The victories were not overwhelming, and they appeared to be pretty fairly matched.

Carver remarked, "What a treat to get a four without any women! In my parish there are some shes who have been playing for half a century, they play long whist, and, of course, always manage to get three honours out of the four, and strange to say they do not always lead their aces first, which is an ordinary woman's notion of whist. I should like to see Gritts yoked to one of them."

"Then," said Gritts, "you have lost every particle of human feeling, at last."

"I did not mean for life, my dear fellow. But you have such a horror of woman that I wonder you even allow them to get-up your shirt-fronts."

"I don't allow them," said Gritts. "I found a Frenchman here, who does his work in a refined and

elegant manner, and now I am dependent upon no feminine labour whatever."

"Well done, Gritts," said Drawler; "you and I will form a society for the extinction of woman yet, and then we shall have put a polish on the universe."

"You men have stayed at Oxford," said Carver, "till you have acquired the habit of speaking on all subjects and dogmatizing on those of which you are especially ignorant. When you *know* woman, you won't talk of annihilating her. It is not to be done at any price. In my parish I have found several old maids and widows, but only one old bachelor and not one old widower. In fact feminine resistance is the only human attribute (beside folly), which partakes of the eternity of force."

"Tut, tut," said Gritts, "there has been no organized method of suppression brought out yet. Let Drawler and Gritts call a new destructive process into action, and they will dissolve like snails and leave not a track behind them."

"Every force has been tried, but still they resist. An old woman has usually gone through as much as would vanquish an army, and yet she looks as serene as if she had just come out of her cradle, with a new patent for a special providence. But what are you doing, partner? They are getting all the tricks."

"Ah!" said Drawler, "you have talked about

women, till he plays like one. Even their very name works mischief."

"Why, damn it," said the Rev. Jingle Gritts, as he threw down his last card, "I had only one trump, which is almost as bad as being tied to one woman."

"As a new vicar, Gritts, it is my duty to say I regret that you still use that obsolete form of prayer. Why, in the country we have actually to say in the pulpit, that swearing is immoral, wicked and all that sort of thing!"

"You may *say* so," replied Gritts, "with about as much meaning as you say *your* obsolete prayers. As if a combination of letters could acquire a moral tinge, even if they were roasted in the mythical fires of a traditional hell!"

"That is a treble to us," said Drawler. And Gritts and Carver became silent in their efforts to make points.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN spite of the tormentors Mr. Wood persevered in seeking to prepare for the lofty privilege of being allowed to devote his energies and time to reforming colliers, at the rate of two pounds a week.

He was attending two courses of divinity lectures, the lack of which had nearly interrupted all communication with Mr. Tickler Wiggem Twisterley, and nothing, short of a special letter from the Lord Bishop, could have prevented that hoary Polyphemus from seeking refuge in dynamite or Scotch whiskey.

(Dear unenlightened public, if we only knew what Bishops, Peers, and Kings have to put up with, we should pray for them with tears!)

Mr. Wood found these divinity lectures so peculiarly unfortunate that he began to fear his new name was telling upon his constitution. But as he looked round upon the abject and yawning weariness —save where it was relieved by "the Pickwick Papers," or the latest novel by "Zola"—his fears vanished, he knew that there could hardly be two hundred men together bearing the name of Wood. These lectures reminded him of the seven ill-favoured kine, for if they had lasted long enough, they would have

swallowed up every scrap of theology which he acquired by diligent reading.

There is no doubt that ecclesiastical dignitaries are not of this world. They breathe another atmosphere, and form their ideas on another model. Such was the conviction of Mr. Wood, when he received the list of books for the coming examination.

It is well known that few men read longer than six months for Deacons, several read only three; I have known a man read one month and be complimented on his knowledge of the books he had never seen. But this list sent to Mr. Wood required at least two years, for an average reader to go attentively through them *once;* and as for knowing them, it would be a matter of reference to an almanac, before one gave an opinion on that subject. Mr. Wood, however, was a quick reader and had read many of them before.

But, whenever he referred to the gigantic task, he observed a sort of stewed smile steal forth, and one day a man asked him if he ever heard of "Sandstone's Patent Extract" of all these books, which said Patent Extract, he went on to show, might be taken in very small doses and yet cure you of any examination malady.

There was, however, to him a novelty in preparing for an examination that removed any weariness from the work. Some branches of this work were, indeed, mysterious, as, for instance, that twenty thousand

clergy, in the most learned Church in the world, should calmly read, day after day, the very *worst rendering* of the finest Hebrew poetry, which was ever made by way of translation.

But he was reminded that a translation was like man himself, a difficult thing to make and a worse to mend. He was reminded that an effort had been made to render the most important part of the Bible more accurate, and to give a meaning to many ambiguous passages. A learned bishop had given his assistance, but tripped here and there and was accordingly Burgotted by an eminent Dean, who pinned up his Right Reverend Father-in-lawn tightly, and then slobbered over him, as a nurse does with a newly exported baby.

CHAPTER XLIX.

EXPECTANT and doomed reader. I occasionally address you, to show that I have not forgotten you are necessary to the proper carrying out of this publication. Out of consideration for you, I am letting you down *gradually*, into the new patent wringing-machine which our nineteenth century is.

Think of the glories with which we began our history—sigh at the recollection of the handsome and noble Count who was so long your companion. Had he remained a Devil, I could have given you some closing chapters like an outburst of sphere music (whatever that is). But now, Mr. Wm. Wood has to interview his tailor. It is absolutely necessary. There is not one of the whole bench of Bishops, who would ever have climbed there, if he had failed to interview his tailor at this particular period.

Think of that, and regard Snipps, though you disregard his bills ! ! !

Our Altruistic friend, with his blue blood and gruelly philosophy, has been going through the process by which patent soaps are brought out, or a

new dentrifice. One single turn has brought him to this, the most ordinary object of the world. He certainly has made considerable advance in point of salary towards that large unpaid class, known as Angels. One more such turn and you might see the gray-haired Bill Wood amongst the other unpaid class, called in Christian countries—Paupers.

Our William has heard, this morning, from his tormentor, Mr. Packthread. Tormentor enclosed list of things that tailor must supply, and that William must take in his portmanteau, along with the other divinity which he takes in his brain.

Now, please, we will rush through, or past, or under, or over, this unpleasant scene. For tailor smiles. Tailor thinks William a great man. (At least, tailor is either born with a large bump of reverence or expects to see his bill paid.) Blush for me, that the universe has come to this, that a toady can be found who regards William as a great man, and William not yet licensed as a curate.

Verily, centre of gravity must be wearing out!

* * * *

But it is over! William has finished the divinity lectures, and he has the two certificates in his pocket, for which his lordship went bondsman to Tickler Wiggem Twisterley, Esquire. Snipps did not fail him. There are the canonical hose, &c., &c., in those two portmanteaus. Snipps sees life with a pale halo round her martyr-face, for he has

got paid, and is contemplating his sixth glass of pale ale. (Every saint has his nimbus, you see.)

William is at the station. And I hope no pious reader will say he was not converted. *Alma mater* is left behind, and, with the wandering instincts of a very old woman, she continues to dress in the finery of her youth, and forgets that the world has gone on in front, and left her to be watched by the —undertaker.

THE END.

NOTE.—The learned and pious author of this volume broke off abruptly with this remark: "Vale lector, et si hic liber tibi displicuerit, alterum exspecta."

From this and the dedication, it would appear that the piety of this divine was of a sturdy and defiant type. Of his learning I venture to make no remark, but leave it to the enlightened public, to whom he has dedicated it.

On several occasions, I had to suggest readings where the original was doubtful, or faded entirely into oblivion, and I fear they sometimes bristle on the ancient document, like new patches on an old garment.

The title of his second volume is "The Devil as a Parish Priest," and if no one misunderstands Vol. I., I may undertake to wade through Vol. II., and do it into English in the manner of "Sternhold and Hopkins."

[EDITOR.]

NOTE.—The Printer's Devil is of opinion that the whole book is piffle and is very glad that he never went to Oxford. But the Editor suspects vanity is at the bottom of that original and brilliant criticism, because he claims the Monarch as a distant relative.